

NICK NORCROSS LUCKY STRIKE!

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THE ACTOR DETECTIVE IN CHICAGO.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



NEARER AND NEARER CREPT MAGGIE MALONEY.

The Actor Detective in Chicago;

OR,

Dick Doom's Flush Hand.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF THE "DICK DOOM" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING TRUNK.

A MAN was pacing the floor of a pleasant room in a fashionable Chicago hotel, ever and anon pausing before a window to gaze out into the crowded thoroughfare beneath.

He was a man possessing a strong, characteristic face, a keen eye and a look of determination and courage.

Though short in build his movements were quick and graceful, his step firm and his physique indicated strength above the average.

Taking out a handsome gold watch he glanced at it impatiently and was stepping toward the bell-button when there came a knock at the door and the porter entered, wheeling in a large and heavy trunk.

"Ah! I was just about to ring to hasten up my trunk, porter, for I have important papers in it I need before going out," and the gentleman slipped a liberal fee into the porter's hand.

Hardly had the door closed behind the porter when the trunk was thrown open and the tray taken out, but dropped back suddenly, while a startled exclamation came from the lips of the man whose eyes had become riveted upon what he beheld.

There he stood like one half-paralyzed with amazement, a look of horror gradually stamping itself upon his fine face, and his whole attitude that of one who had received a severe shock.

And no wonder he stood thus, for before him, cramped into the bottom of the trunk, was the form of a woman!

"Great God! what does, what can this mean!" came from the astounded man, and suddenly he closed the top, glanced at it, then stepped to the side and gazed fixedly at the name stamped there.

"Yes, it is *my trunk*; there is my name upon the end, and my key unlocked it.

"What does it mean?"

"I do not know, I do not understand it; it is a horrible mystery beyond my comprehension, this dead body of a woman packed into my trunk!"

He passed his hand anxiously across his forehead as he spoke, took two or three turns across the room, as though to collect his thoughts, and returning, slowly opened the trunk once more.

He first looked into the tray.

There was nothing in it.

Then he examined the upper part.

It, too, was empty.

His next move was to once more raise the tray and look down upon the ghastly contents of the lower part of the large receptacle.

He did so reverently, and as one who held respect for the dead whoever it might be.

As he did so his eyes looked more calmly upon the cramped form which had at first so startled him.

It was the form of a young girl, and one whose face was beautiful, whose every outline was the perfection of grace.

Her long, red-golden hair lay in waves about her, her arms were folded, and her lower limbs were cramped so as to get the form into the trunk.

Her hands and feet were small and shapely, the latter incased in stylishly made shoes, and she was dressed in a dark-blue traveling suit, while a hat, broken umbrella, her gloves, a shopping bag and a wrap were also in the trunk, as a look revealed, for the

finder of so startling a spectacle did not care to make any search then.

He placed his hand gently upon the white face and found it cold and clammy.

Then he laid his fingers upon the pulse.

"She is dead, and has been so, for hours.

"Oh! that I could understand what it means!"

He looked more searchingly then at the trunk, and said, suddenly:

"This is *not* my trunk! Though strikingly similar without, and bearing my name, while my key unlocks it, this is *not* my trunk, but one made to resemble it!

"Yes, the lining is different, as also the interior of the tray.

"My trunk is missing, and has been stolen for a purpose, that purpose being to get possession of the important papers I carried in it, and which must be found at once, and at any cost.

"Yes, I must not tarry here, but hasten at once to the chief of police and report the terrible discovery that I have made."

As he spoke he hastily closed and locked the trunk, seized his hat and left the room, meeting outside in the corridor one whom he stopped to gaze at intently.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTUNATE MEETING.

THIS person was a young man whose appearance would command attention anywhere.

His face was really as beautiful, in perfection of feature and expression as a woman's, his eyes being large, shaded by the longest of lashes, and with a world of mystery in their depths.

He was slightly undersized, but possessed a sinewy, well-knit frame, small hands and feet, and was stylishly dressed.

He had seen the one who came out of Room 169, without appearing to see him, and was passing on when halted by the words:

"You are Dick Doom, sir, the detective—the man of all men I wish at this moment most to see."

The one addressed halted and gazed fixedly into the face of the speaker, while he said:

"Yes, I am Dick Doom, and you are—"

"Who? You surely cannot recall me?" and the question was asked with considerable interest.

The reply came promptly, though reflectively:

"Yes, I recall having seen you upon the stage, for you are an actor."

"I am, sir."

"Ah! I have it now! I saw you six years ago; you are the comedian, Justin Keener; I last saw you when you were playing the Dutchman, in Buffalo Bill's play."

"You are right, Mr. Doom, and you have a very remarkable memory, sir."

"It is my business to remember faces, and I never forget one I am once impressed with, and though you were in make-up on the single occasion of our meeting, I remember you now perfectly, Mr. Keener."

"I am glad that you do, sir, and let me tell you that I was just going to make a startling report to the chief of police when a most fortunate circumstance indeed brought me face to face with you, when, as I said, I would rather see you just now than any one else."

"How can I serve you, Mr. Keener, for I recall with pleasure that I was taken back on the stage and presented to Colonel Cody and yourself by our mutual friend, the chief of the New York Secret Service Bureau."

"Come into my room, please, and you shall know how you can serve me, Mr. Doom, for you can do so far more than you think."

The comedian at once led the famous detective into his room, locked the door and said:

"Take a look at that trunk please, Detec-

tive. Doom, and say if you see anything striking about it."

Dick Doom eyed it closely and said:

"It is a large, fine trunk, somewhat travel-stained, better than the average and bears your name. What secret it holds may be the strong point about it."

"Ah! you have hit the nail on the head, for it does hold a secret."

"You wish to tell it to me?"

"I wish to say that I supposed that to be my trunk, sir, but find that it is not."

"It bears your name."

"It does, and more, is about the size and appearance of my trunk, while my key unlocks it."

"That is strange, but can be explained by the fact that you perhaps had valuables in your trunk which were known to others, who laid a plot to get possession of it and to get time to secure it wholly, planned to put this one in its place."

"Mr. Doom, you have such a direct way of getting at bottom facts that I would really suspect that you had exchanged the trunks if I did not know you."

"When did you see your trunk last?"

"Two days ago when I left my rooms in Joe Smith's quarters in Union Square, New York."

"You had valuables in it?"

"I had most important papers in it, sir—papers upon which a fortune and future happiness to several persons depend."

"Indeed? And this became known?"

"I did not think that it was known, sir; but it must have been, as such a clever plot was concocted to get possession of the papers," said Justin Keener.

"Yes, it was known to some one who could lose or benefit by those papers."

"Did you check the trunk through to Chicago?"

"I did, sir, going myself to an Express company where I got the receipt for it, and was handed the check at the depot where I took the train."

"And arriving here you found that an exchange had been made?"

"Yes, sir, one I did not notice until I had opened the trunk and raised the tray."

"My key had unlocked it, and—but let me show you the discovery that I made when I did open it," and Justin Keener put his key into the lock, raised the top, took out the tray and exposing to the startled detective the body within, cried:

"Behold! that is the secret the trunk contains!"

CHAPTER III.

DICK DOOM TAKES THE CASE.

Dick Doom's face was always serene.

He had a countenance most expressive indeed, yet which he had under perfect control.

He was not a man to show what he felt, and yet, when he gazed upon that beautiful, white face, that lovely form cramped into the trunk, dead and the victim of some one's hate, or fear, he did change color and said quickly:

"My God, Mr. Keener, this is a dread, a terrible secret."

"It is one that unnerved me when I beheld it," muttered Justin Keener, sadly.

"And yet you are not one to be easily upset, your face shows that, for you are a man of nerve."

"But I do not wonder that you felt the shock," and Dick Doom's piercing eyes were riveted upon the face of the actor, with a look that seemed to read his very soul.

"Mr. Doom?"

"Yes, Keener."

"When I was starting to the chief of police an ugly thought flashed through my mind."

"What was it, may I ask?"

"I thought that I might be suspected of knowing more of this case than I admitted."

"Very true, you might; but I see the situation as it is."

"Let us find out who this poor victim is."

Dick Doom leant over and took out the broken umbrella.

"It was an affair of silk and lace and very handsome."

The handle was carved and upon it were the initials:

"E. E."

Then he took out the shopping-bag.

It too was empty, but upon it were the same initials, and a handkerchief had the "E. E." in a monogram.

The hat was taken from the trunk, and the body was raised gently and placed upon the bed; but the cramped position it had been in held the limbs just as they were.

The dress and underclothing were of the finest material, and not a piece of jewelry was found, nor a purse, giving the impression that it had been murder for the hope of gain.

"Mr. Keener."

"Yes, sir."

"This is a remarkable case."

"How was she killed?"

"Drugged, of course, for there is no wound, no evidence of violence."

"What is to be done?"

"Replace the body, change your hotel, send the trunk to the quarters of the chief of the Secret Service, and put the case in his hands, and, if he is wise, he will keep the affair out of the papers until he has run it down."

"But what can be done with the body?"

"He can have it placed in a metallic coffin and sent out to a receiving vault to await future developments; but really a *post mortem* should be held, to discover the real cause of death, and the remains should be thoroughly embalmed."

"But he will arrange all."

"Mr. Doom?"

"Well, Mr. Keener?"

"Will you not take this case for me?"

"You wish it?"

"Particularly I do, for I know your reputation as a shadower of bad men, a terror to criminals."

"I must understand the whole situation, Mr. Keener, as you know it is best not to work in the dark, and also important for your own sake."

"I shall tell you the whole story, sir, for, as you say, you must not work in the dark, and it looks to me as though I was in a very compromising situation, as I can offer no explanation to clear up this horrible mystery."

"We will get you out of the woods all right, Mr. Keener."

"Then you will take the case wholly in your hands?"

"I will."

"Good! and the recompense?"

"We will talk of that when the murderer of this poor girl is found, and—"

"For all the money you need for expenses command me."

"Thanks, but I shall need none, and in fact this case so interests me, Mr. Keener, that I shall undertake it simply to run the mystery to earth, for my own satisfaction," and Dick Doom's words showed how much he was interested in the case.

CHAPTER IV.

JUSTIN KEENER'S STORY.

WHEN Justin Keener had held a short conversation with Dick Doom, as to what was best to be done, the body was replaced in the trunk, and the actor went to the office, paid his bill, and said that he had news that would cause him to change his quarters.

He then went to another hotel, suggested to him by the detective, and engaged pleasant quarters, while his trunk had been taken by Dick Doom in a carriage and carried to the Secret Service Headquarters.

Having sent the trunk into the chief's private office, with a note, Dick Doom drove to the hotel where Justin Keener had put up, and the two sat down for a long and confidential talk together, the detective remarking:

"Now, Mr. Keener, I wish to know your story of this affair, and just what your connection with it is."

"I'll give it to you from Alpha to Omega, Mr. Doom, and you can understand just what the situation is," and lighting a cigar Justin Keener continued:

"You have heard of Ben Bancroft, the actor?"

"Yes, a man with a strange career, I have heard."

"Strange, indeed, and a mystery to his best friends. He appeared upon the stage playing leading parts, went to London and got an engagement that was making a fortune for him, where his good looks and talent won the heart of a young girl whom he met clandestinely, and afterward secretly married."

"Then he returned to the United States, bringing his wife with him, and it was then that I first met him, for I saved both his and his wife's life one day when they were bathing in the surf at Long Branch."

"She had ventured too far out, lost her nerve and Ben went to her aid; but he had just had a long swim and his strength gave out, and but for my going to their rescue both would have drowned together."

"He never forgot me for it, and giving up his engagement in New York, went to Australia and I lost sight of him until I learned of his death in Europe."

"What became of his wife I did not know until I received a letter from her, a year ago, telling me that she was on her dying bed, and that she had three children, two daughters, and a son, then in the United States."

"She further stated that she died in poverty, though she had a fortune, inherited from her father, who was a nobleman, and who had never forgiven her running away and marrying an actor."

"He had, however, a certain property which could not go to her brother, as it was for the female members of the family, and this was hers, and would be given to her children, while her son could really claim the title and estate left by her father."

"As long as she lived she would claim nothing for herself, but after her death she wished her children to have what was rightly their own."

"Such was her letter and it ended by saying that she left it to me to find her children and gain for them their inheritance, for both she and her husband regarded me most kindly."

Letters, documents, jewelry and little mementoes she sent, all of which went to prove her claim to the estate, and which would give the inheritance to her children."

"She wrote that she would not place the matter in an attorney's hands, but leave all to me to do!"

"Well, Mr. Doom, the box of papers and other things came to me in time, and packing them away in my trunk, I set to work to find those children of poor Ben Bancroft."

"Have you found them?"

"I have not, but I learned that one of his daughters, or who was supposed to be, had gone upon the stage, and I traced her to Chicago, so came on here to look her up, for if I found her, then the finding of her sister and brother would be an easy matter."

"And it was those papers and souvenirs that your trunk contained?"

"Yes, with some things of my own."

"Who knew that you had those papers?"

"Not a soul that I am aware of."

"Who knew that you had that letter from Mrs. Bancroft?"

"No one, for I kept it as a secret as her letter requested, until her children were found."

"She made this request?"

"She did, and said that it was for the good of her children that she did so."

"This would indicate that some one would plot against them."

"Yes, it would."

"And you expressed that trunk intact from New York to Chicago?"

"I expressed it to the depot, and there checked it to Chicago."

"And found that the trunk had been changed, and a dead body placed in the one you held the check for?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the mother give the name of her children?"

"Yes, the boy was named Bancroft Enders, one of the girls—and they were twins—bore the name of Eleanor Enders—"

"Ah!"

"And the other was Estelle Enders."

At the mention of the last name Dick Doom sprung to his feet excitedly.

CHAPTER V.

AN AMAZED ACTOR.

"JUSTIN KEENER, I have something to tell you," said Dick Doom, recovering himself in an instant, and now as calm as ever, though he spoke impressively.

"Yes, Mr. Doom," answered the actor with the look of a man who expected to hear something of great interest.

"Where have you been the past few months, Mr. Keener?"

"In Mexico and the West Indies on a tour."

"That accounts for your not having seen the American papers?"

"I did not read a line of news for months."

"Then let me tell you that there was a murder committed here some time ago, the victim being a young and beautiful girl, who was found dead in a pretty rowboat that drifted ashore upon the grounds of a millionaire of this city."

"A note clasped in the hand of the girl stated that she had committed suicide, and no one was to blame but herself, while a bottle of chloroform, in the boat, and the fact that her jewelry and pocketbook had not been touched, lent truth to the belief."

"But, standing on the wharf, off Van Buren street one night, I heard a cry in a woman's voice, calling for help, and though I at once left the city, some time after I was sent for, by the chief of the Secret Service to look into the case, a youth here having taken the idea that the girl had been murdered."

"I compared notes and found that it was upon the night that I heard the cry for help, and so I agreed with my young friend that it was murder, and with him, and his boy allies, known as the River Rats, we shadowed the man suspected of having taken the life of the young girl."

"He was a handsome young fellow, whose antecedents were not known, and he lived in fine style, always having plenty of money, while he was engaged to the daughter of the millionaire on whose grounds the boat had been found, containing the dead body of the girl."

"Well, we ran him down, got him into prison, and he escaped by a very clever and bold act, taking the life of one of the guards to do so."

"Again we set to work, my Boy Ferrets under their young chief, and myself, and at last ran him down once more."

"Now this young leader of the Boy Ferrets, Nick Norcross by name, once was not

what he now is, having been well born, I am sure.

"One day he saved a child from being run over, but got a broken leg for his heroism, and the young lady, who was found dead in the boat, took him to a hospital and had him well cared for, and when he saw in the papers that she had committed suicide, and that nothing was known of her, he decided that she had been murdered, and set to work to find out who she was.

"While on the case in disguise, I was set upon one night, and would have been done up but for the gallant rescue of this youth, who saved my life, and thus we became firm friends.

"We tracked down the murderer of the girl, but he escaped, and, as I said we ran him down again, but could learn nothing of the girl's antecedents, and she is still a mystery to all.

"But let me tell you that I came back to Chicago again at a call from my young captain of the Boy Ferrets, as also a telegram from the chief of the Secret Service, telling me that the prisoner, Merton Sanford, had once more escaped, and by chloroforming his guard in some mysterious way.

"He is then free to be hunted down for the third time, and I came on to do the work, aided by my allies, the Boy Ferrets.

"But, strangest of all, you now give me information, the startling effect of which you can understand, when I tell you that the name of the young girl murdered by Merton Sanford was *Estelle Enders*."

"My God!" came in a tone of horror from the lips of Justin Keener as he sunk back in his chair and added with a voice that was husky with emotion:

"Poor Ben Bancroft's daughter!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ACTOR ALLY.

THERE was no mistaking the fact that Justin Keener was greatly startled by the discovery that one of the children of his old and valued friend, Ben Bancroft, had been murdered.

He paced the room a few minutes to regain his composure, and then said, as he halted in front of the detective, who was perfectly cool now:

"Can there not be some mistake, Detective Doom?"

"It might be a coincidence of names, yet a remarkable one.

"How old would the twin daughters of Ben Bancroft be now, if alive?"

"Their mother said eighteen."

"The Estelle Enders, whom Sanford murdered, was about that age."

"And he is free now, having escaped for the second time, you say?"

"Yes, he is free."

"But he will—he *shall* be found!"

"Yes, that is what I have come to Chicago again for."

"When did he escape?"

"Two weeks ago, just on the eve of his trial."

"That man must be hanged, for something tells me the victim of the boat was the daughter of my friend."

"That is what I believe, also; but we will hunt him down, for I have some clever *aides* to help me in my Boy Ferrets, and Nick Norcross, their young chief, is determined to avenge the death of the beautiful girl who befriended him, and was so cruelly murdered by Sanford."

"I hope, I believe, he will yet meet just punishment, as you have undertaken the work of running him down."

"But I need an ally, Mr. Keener."

"Who is he?"

"One whose interest should make him aid me, and who would be of vast assistance to me."

"Well, if it is money he needs, why I will—"

"It is not money in one sense of the word, though it may amount to considerable loss to him."

"I will be willing to supply any reasonable sum gladly, so that we can secure his services."

"It will be for you to say then."

"In what way?"

"You are the man that I need as my ally, my side partner in this matter, Mr. Keener."

"I?" asked Justin Keener, with surprise.

"Yes, you."

"I am an actor, not a detective."

"Yes, you are an actor and a good one, a comedian at that, but you will make a good detective, too."

"You think so?"

"I know so, for you showed nerve and cleverness in not raising an alarm in the hotel when you made the awful discovery that the trunk you supposed to be your own, held a dead body, and you started to see the chief of the Secret Service and make your report, met me, told me very quietly the situation and were full of grit, though of course greatly shocked."

"Yes, I want you, Justin Keener, as my ally, and we will solve this mystery together, aided by my Boy Ferrets, for you know the whole circumstances regarding the Bancroft family and the heirs, and though you will have to cancel your professional engagements for the season, you will have done a noble service."

"As I said before, Mr. Doom, I am willing to make any sacrifice in my power to solve this mystery, and if it was Estelle Enders who was murdered, bring her murderer to the gallows."

"Yes, I will be your ally in this matter, and stick to you to the end," and Justin Keener held forth his hand and Dick Doom grasped it warmly while he said:

"There is one more thing, Keener, which we must take into consideration."

"What is that, sir?"

"First, I wish you to go with me to see the chief of the Secret Service, and then to meet the Boy Ferrets."

"I shall be glad to do so."

"But now let me call your attention to the fact that one of the twin daughters of Bancroft was named Estelle Enders."

"Yes."

"And the other Eleanor."

"Very true."

"The initials on the umbrella, handkerchief and clothing of the young victim in your trunk were E. E."

Justin Keener started, gazed fixedly at the detective and asked in a suppressed voice:

"Do you think she can have been Eleanor Enders?"

"I will soon know, for there is one who can tell me," was the reply.

CHAPTER VII.

A COMEDIAN IN A TRAGEDY.

DICK DOOM went from the hotel, where Justin Keener had made his quarters to the chief of the Secret Service.

He left the comedian to go out shopping, for his trunk having been stolen he was in need of clothing and other necessities which he at once fitted himself out with and sent to his hotel.

Arriving at Headquarters, Dick Doom sent in a card to the chief, for he made it a rule never to be known by the detectives and police where it could be avoided.

So he always sent in a card bearing another name than his own, and which was known the chief.

He also often went in disguises which the keen eyes of the chief could not penetrate.

"Ah, Dick, glad to see you, for I am curi-

ous about this trunk you had sent here, and which I see bears the name of a well-known and popular comedian, Justin Keener."

"Yes, chief, and it bears a mystery, too, which will surprise and startle you; but I trust you will be willing to be guided by my wishes in regard to the disposition temporarily of the contents."

"I certainly will, Dick, for you are not one to go wrong."

"Thank you, sir. Here is the key and I will show you the contents of the trunk."

As Dick Doom spoke he took from his pocket the key given him by Justin Keener, and a moment after threw open the trunk.

Accustomed as he was to see crime in all of its worst phases, to be brought in daily contact with tragedies and deeds of blood, to witness sorrow and suffering in all its forms, the chief could not restrain an exclamation of horror at sight of the body of the beautiful girl all cramped into the trunk as it was.

"My dear Dick, what does this mean?"

"I will explain, sir, in a very few words, and then we will talk over the matter at leisure before the coming of my actor ally, Justin Keener, who is to help me to solve this mystery, for he is the one who has been hardest hit by this tragedy, save the poor girl who is the victim of some fiend's hatred."

"Tell me all you can about this terrible affair, Dick Doom, for I am painfully interested in it, I assure you," and the chief raised the masses of beautiful hair and gazed sadly upon the face so white and calm in death.

Dick Doom told the whole story, just as he had heard it from Justin Keener, and the chief shook his head and said:

"This is a very serious and sad affair, Dick, and one that must be sifted to the very bottom facts."

"To me it seems as though some one, I cannot say avenger, but some one who has most to gain by the death of these girls, these twin sisters, has dogged them to their death that he, or she, might gain thereby, and that means also the death of Bancroft's boy as well, if his life has not already been taken."

"Which I fear is the case, sir, for he would be the first one to put out of the way."

"Very true; but your idea about keeping this secret murder hidden from the public, until we can get time to act, is the correct one, and it shall be done; but you seem so assured that this poor girl is Eleanor Enders, one of the twin sisters, that I cannot but believe as you do."

"I am sure that she is Eleanor Enders, sir."

"Well, the face is familiar to me, though I cannot recall that of Estelle Enders sufficiently to be sure that she resembles her."

"I know one who does remember her, sir."

"Who is that?"

"Nick Norcross, my Boy Ferrets' captain."

"Ah! then he must see the body."

"He shall, sir, for I shall take him to the undertaker's where the poor girl has been laid out."

"You will have a *post mortem*, sir, to discover the cause of death?"

"Oh yes, my surgeon of the force and one other shall perform the autopsy."

"And she can be taken by night to the receiving vault without it becoming known?"

"Yes, that can be arranged too—ah! here is Justin Keener now," said the chief as he went to the locked door and took a card handed him through the slide.

The actor entered and was presented to the chief by Dick Doom.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing you on the stage, Mr. Keener, and am glad to meet you personally, though I regret that it is a sad tragedy and not a comedy that makes us acquainted," said the chief cordially.

"Yes, sir, a tragedy indeed it is, and one in which I as a comedian regret to be playing a leading part. Is it not an awful affair, sir?"

"It is, indeed; but, I feel sure that the mystery can be solved by Dick Doom with the aid of yourself and his Boy Ferrets, and what assistance I can lend."

"I hope so, sir."

"And when solved, chief, as Merton Sanford was the murderer of Estelle Enders, I feel sure that you will find his red hand guilty again, and he is the man to once more run down," impressively said Dick Doom, while the chief added:

"And I predict that you will do it, Dick."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VISIT TO THE UNDERTAKER.

DICK DOOM and Justin Keener sat together in the rooms of the former at the hotel.

They were pleasant rooms, for the detective always lived well. He had a parlor, with a bedroom on either side, so that he had a chance to put on his disguises at will.

There were several large trunks in the rooms, and they presented more the appearance of being occupied by a family than by a young bachelor.

It was night and the two friends, for so they had now become, were talking over their visit to the chief and the probable results that would follow their work as allies.

"It is time for my Boy Ferret captain to be here, and he is always sharp on time," said the detective, looking at his watch.

"And you know nothing of this youth, Norcross, Mr. Doom?" asked Justin Keener.

"Only such as he knows of himself, or has cared to reveal, for otherwise he is an unfathomable mystery to me, I assure you."

"He saved your life, you told me?"

"Yes, and we became good friends. I found that he had been befriended by Estelle Enders, and learning that he was chief of a gang of young River Rats, as they were called, I decided that there was good Secret Service material in the boy and his comrades for me.

"The police accused them of being all that was bad, and hunted them down without mercy; but I found that, though some of them had been scamps, Nick had been their redemption, for he had organized them into a band of Boy Ferrets, and was really doing good service, though that they were suspected as being all that was vile by the officers of the law.

"I took them in hand, engaged them in my service, and though still allowing them to be considered criminals by the police, use them as I need them, and never did I have men to serve me better.

"Nick was well-born, I am sure, is fairly well-educated, a handsome young fellow and as brave as a lion.

"You will like him, I am sure."

Just then a knock came at the door, and in response to Dick Doom's call to enter a youth stepped into the room.

He closed the door behind him, doffed his cap and bowed, while he said:

"I am fifteen minutes late, sir, but I was dodging a cop that got his eye upon me."

Then he saw Justin Keener and his face flushed and he added:

"Pardon me, sir, but I thought you was alone."

"No, Nick; I have a friend with me whom I wish you to know, Mr. Justin Keener the comedian."

"I am glad to see you, sir, and it seems, Mr. Keener, that I have met you before—ah yes, I have seen you upon the stage."

"And I am glad to meet you, Nick, and trust we shall be good friends," said the actor in his kindly way, as he warmly grasped the hand of the lad.

Nick Norcross was indeed a handsome youth, with a face to admire and trust.

His form was erect, his bearing soldierly,

and his expression manly, while he was dressed in a sailor suit, as though he were a "seaman of the Great Lakes."

"Sit down, Nick, until I am ready for you to go with us, for Mr. Keener and I have a call to make and you are to accompany us."

"I am at your service, sir."

"Have you any news?"

"None, sir, but—"

He hesitated and glanced at Justin Keener, and Dick Doom said:

"Speak out, Nick, for Mr. Keener is an ally in this trail, by my special request."

"Well, sir, my ferrets are at work trying to find some clue to Merton Sanford's whereabouts, for I do not believe he has left the city."

"Nor do I. He is too cunning a villain to venture out of his hiding place here, and we will yet catch him."

"I sincerely hope so, sir."

"Now, Nick, I am ready and we will go and make the visit I spoke of."

Detective Doom, Justin Keener, and the Boy Ferret left the rooms together and wended their way to an obscure side street in which there were mostly business houses.

Dick Doom led the way and they entered an establishment on the door of which was a sign reading:

"PLANT GRAVES,"

UNDERTAKER.

"Patronage solicited and satisfaction guaranteed."

What was the satisfaction guaranteed the sign did not divulge, but the comedian remarked:

"A very suggestive name for an undertaker, yet somewhat cheeky in him soliciting patronage."

"He is a man with a political pull, and gets much work from the city on that account," Dick Doom remarked, while Nick looked around the dismal place and wondered what had brought the detective and his comedian ally there.

Mr. Plant Graves came forward with a sepulchral smile, as he welcomed his visitors, doubtless thinking he had customers, and trying to put a sympathetic look in his glance, though the expression would crop out:

"What is your loss is my gain."

"Mr. Graves, I presume?" said Dick Doom.

"Yis, sir, and although I do not know yez, allow me to be after offering me sympathy, sur."

"For what?"

The cool query quite upset Mr. Graves, who flushed, stammered and asked:

"Is not some of the family did, then?"

"I have no family, sir," was the curt reply of the detective, and my friends here are not in need of sympathy either; but I have a letter here from the chief of the Secret Service which explains itself."

The undertaker slightly started, took the letter and read it.

"This says, sir, to let the bearer, a United States Detective, and those accompanying him, view the remains, unaccompanied by any one else."

"It does, sir."

"Of course I go with yez?"

"Of course you do not, sir," was the reply, followed by the words:

"Where will I find the body?"

"Up those stairs, the first door to the right; here is the key."

Dick Doom took the key and passed on, followed by Justin Keener and Nick, the latter wondering what it all meant.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECOGNITION.

THE undertaker did not seem exactly happy, at the somewhat brusque manner in which Dick Doom dispensed with his fur-

ther services; but there was something about the detective that commanded respect and prevented any argument, and he made no attempt to follow.

Reaching the floor above, Dick Doom placed the key in the door he had been directed to, and pausing a minute said:

"Nick, I have brought you with us to view the remains laid out here to see if you have ever seen the dead person before."

"Yes, sir."

"I give you no clue as to what you may expect, for I wish to be sure that my surmise in the matter is right, and if the dead person is the one I have told Mr. Keener here that it is."

"Death often changes one greatly, Mr. Doom, but if I have seen the dead person in life, I will, I think, recall the face," answered Nick Norcross, very calmly.

With this the detective entered the room, Justin Keener following, and Nick bringing up the rear.

The room was a large one and devoid of furniture, save the stand upon which a coffin sat, and a large table.

The windows were open at the top, and the coffin-lid though on was not fast.

Dick Doom stepped forward, while Nick drew a long breath, and stood awaiting what was to come.

Aided by Justin Keener the massive coffin-lid was raised and placed upon the table.

While the two did this Nick Norcross had stepped nearer the confined form and gazed down upon the upturned face, beautiful in death.

The golden hair was neatly arranged, the eyes were closed as though the dead girl was not in her last, long sleep, and the hands were folded peacefully upon the stilled heart.

The form was clad in a neat, white dress, and a bunch of lilies of the valley lay upon her bosom.

With one look into the face, Nick Norcross cried:

"Oh, Mr. Doom, you have taken her out of the grave, then?"

"Taken who, Nick?"

"Miss Estelle Enders, the one who was so good to me!" and the tears came into the brave boy's eyes, while, bending over, he reverently pressed a kiss upon the tiny white hands folded on her breast.

"Nick, that is *not* Estelle Enders."

"Ah! Mr. Doom, do not trifle with me, sir, for I know her but too well."

"You believe that she was buried, and, for some reason, has been taken from her grave?"

"Yes, sir."

"Think a moment, and you will see that it is impossible; for see, this coffin was never in the grave."

"I am not mistaken, Mr. Doom; I know that beautiful face," earnestly insisted Nick Norcross.

"Nick?" impressively said the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"You saw a good deal of Miss Enders, did you not?"

"No, sir; I saw her the day I was run over, and she called a carriage and took me in the hospital, and waited to see that I was not fatally hurt, and had every attention.

"She called several times afterward, sir, always bringing me fruit and flowers, and oh! she was so good to me, so you do not wonder that I grieve for her, as I had no mother or sister to love," and Nick choked up with feeling.

"Nick, that is not Miss Estelle Enders who lies dead before you," announced Dick Doom.

"Do you mean it, sir?"

"Am I not right, Mr. Keener?"

"You are, sir, for Miss Enders whom Nick knew is in her grave, and, as you told me, was murdered by a man by the name of Sanford."

"Yes, that is true."

"Then who is this lady who so resembles Miss Enders, sir?"

"She is an unknown, Nick, and whose story I will tell you, for I am, as Mr. Doom told you, his ally and yours, in hunting down this mystery."

"I am glad of that, Mr. Keener, for I have confidence in you, sir."

"Thank you, Nick; but did you ever hear Miss Enders speak of having a sister?"

"No, Mr. Keener, but if she had a sister, then she is the dead lady before us, sir," declared Nick with emphasis.

"The recognition is complete, Keener, so let us go, and you can tell Nick the story of this poor girl's fate, and to-night we three will go with her to the vault," and Dick Doom started to replace the coffin lid, but ere he did so Nick once more bent over and this time touched his lips to the cold, white forehead.

CHAPTER X.

TIGHTENING THE COILS.

THE touching act of the young ferret captain, in pressing his lips upon the forehead of the dead girl, one unknown to him, impressed both Dick Doom and Justin Keener.

It was a simple act, and called forth they supposed by the resemblance of the dead girl to the one who had befriended him, who they both had now begun to feel assured was the sister of Estelle Enders.

The fact that both girls, twin sisters, had met with a violent death, was enough to arouse the pity and anger of any one, and Dick Doom mentally took oath that he would never leave the trail of their murderer, or murderers, until justice was meted out upon the gallows.

Leaving the room Dick Doom returned the key to the undertaker, telling him that the body must be placed in a hearse that night, and a carriage would call there at nine, when all would be ready to take it to the receiving vault in the cemetery.

The undertaker received his orders, knowing that they came from one in authority, and as they left the gruesome place Nick asked:

"Can I go to-night, sir?"

"To the vault with the remains, Nick?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see no reason why you should not, for the chief here asked me to go, and I requested Mr. Keener to accompany me, so you can go along too."

"Thank you, sir."

"Be at my hotel at nine o'clock."

"I'll be there, sir," and Nick went his way, while Dick Doom and Justin Keener walked on to the office of the chief of the Secret Service.

They found the chief in his office, were promptly admitted, and Dick Doom said:

"Nick recognized the body at once, sir."

"As that of Estelle Enders?"

"Yes, chief."

"Then it must be, as you surmised, Dick, the body of her twin sister."

"Yes, sir, the initials, the fact of her being murdered, her striking resemblance, apparent age and no clue to the identity being found, all point to this."

"Beyond all doubt," assented Justin Keener, and he asked:

"Have you the report of the surgeon, sir, upon his autopsy?"

"Yes, here it is, and I was going to send it to you, Dick, if you had not called."

He handed a paper as he spoke to the comedian detective, who read a few lines and then said:

"They report her in perfect health, and that she died from the effects of morphine, which drug was found in large quantities in her stomach."

"Yes, she was murdered," said Dick Doom.

"Might she not have taken her own life, Dick?" suggested the chief.

"If so, sir, why was it that she was packed in a trunk?"

"Ah yes."

"A trunk that was secured to resemble that of our friend Keener, here, while his has most mysteriously disappeared."

"True again. There is no doubt but that she was murdered, and as the same fate was her sister's, with the papers giving them an inheritance stolen, it proves conclusively that the same person or persons are at the bottom of the fiendish deeds for the purpose of securing gold," said the chief.

"And if Sanford murdered Estelle Enders, and he is now free, why not suspect him of being connected with the death of this unfortunate girl also?" asked the actor.

"Yes, Sanford must be found, your trunk must be traced, and then we will have in hand the key to the mysterious deaths of those two girls."

"Have you arranged any plans of action yet, Dick?"

"I have no definite plans, chief, but am plotting to work up to one."

"I will see that the body of the girl is put away in the vault, and then I will leave my ally, here, Mr. Keener, and my Boy Ferrets, to work on the case here while I go East to trace the trunk that was so cleverly stolen."

"And do you need any of my men here?"

"I may, sir, and Mr. Keener will know where to come should he need your aid," and with this the detective and his actor assistant left the quarters of the Secret Service chief and returned to their hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER SHADOW OF NIGHT.

NICK NORCROSS was sharp on time at the hotel, and with Dick Doom and Justin Keener entered the carriage to go to the cemetery with the remains of the murdered girl.

The undertaker and the assistant were ready, the coffin having been placed in a hearse, which drove out alone from the rear yard, the carriage following soon after.

The road was taken to the cemetery where the body of Estelle Enders had been buried, and when the hearse halted before the receiving vault, Dick Doom, Justin Keener, Nick and the undertaker acted as pall-bearers, and the coffin was placed in a niche to await future developments.

Upon the coffin were three bunches of flowers, the offering of the detective, his actor ally and the Boy Ferret.

Entering the carriage the driver was told to return to town by the avenue leading by the mansion of millionaire Marlborough, upon the shore of whose ground had been found the boat containing the body of Estelle Enders.

Two blocks from the mansion the vehicle was halted, and the three occupants alighting made their way under Nick's guidance to the deserted mansion with its extensive ornamental grounds surrounding it.

All was dark and desolate there, and as they leaped the fence, for the gate was padlocked, Dick Doom said:

"I might as well tell you, Mr. Keener, that over this place appears to hang a curse. It had a weird history of murders committed before it was purchased by Mr. Marlborough, who wholly refitted, enlarged and improved it, making it his home."

"It was on this shore the boat with Estelle Enders's body was left by Sanford, and when Nick, here, came to try and find the murderer by the boat, which he decided to steal for the purpose, he was attacked by a man Sanford had sent here to get the boat, and killed him, but not until the fellow had killed Mr. Marlborough's coachman."

"Now the place being deserted, called

haunted by the people near, and left closed, Nick made his retreat, with his twelve ferrets in the upper story of the stable, which overhangs the water, with a hiding-place under the dock for their boats.

"Several nights after Sanford's first escape from prison, Nick saw a light in the house, entered it alone, saw what appeared to be a ghost there, in an upper room, and not showing fear was attacked, and he killed the man who was wrapped in a sheet playing his ghostly tricks."

"He proved to be Sanford's valet, and not wishing to give publicity to the affair until the proper time, Nick having come to report to me, we buried the dead man in the vegetable garden, where he still lies."

"When killed by Nick, the fugitive murderer, Sanford, was then in the house, but escaped, and Nick and I tracked him to his hiding-place by his dog, which he had left behind in his flight."

"Some days after we captured the man, and yet he has again escaped."

"Now you see this deserted old mansion has a gruesome history, and I came by here to-night to leave Nick at his retreat in the stable, and also to have a look through the mansion, for Merton Sanford is just bold enough to again come here to seek a hiding-place."

"You will go over the mansion with me, Mr. Keener?"

"With pleasure, and offer up prayers at every step that we may catch that fellow here," was the comedian's earnest reply.

The three then entered the mansion by a rear door, Nick opening the door with keys that he carried, and finding a lantern and matches inside where he had placed them upon a former visit.

The brave youth shuddered slightly as they went into the room where he had killed the man masquerading as a ghost and saw the dark stain of blood upon the carpet; but he made no comment, and the tour of the large mansion revealing no trace of the fugitive, Dick Doom suggested a return to the hotel, and he and Justin Keener bade the youth good-night and returning to their carriage an hour after were in their rooms, having made a night of their weird Secret Service work.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FERRETS' RETREAT.

NICK NORCROSS, after being left at the gate of the Marlborough mansion by Dick Doom and Justin Keener, watched the two until they passed out of sight in the darkness on their way to their carriage, and then he turned and walked slowly around the house.

He went by the stable to the lake end, which hung over the water, and passed along a sill to the center, where, hanging from an upper window was a rope-ladder.

This he climbed and disappeared in the open window.

All was dark within, but the sound of breathing was distinctly heard, showing that there were a number of persons in there asleep.

Passing through the loft, for such it was, Nick came to a door in the other end of the stable, and though all was dark he entered, lighted a match and found himself in a small room which was comfortably, but plainly furnished.

He undressed, put out his light and threw himself down to sleep.

But slumber did not come to him as was its wont, and he tossed in his bed restlessly until at last he got up and going to the window took down the blanket hanging over it, raised the sash and partly opened one blind, for it would never have done for a light to be seen there by belated pedestrians, and so the windows were all thoroughly shielded.

As he sat there his eyes suddenly discovered a flash of light through closed blinds in the third floor of the mansion.

He looked again, the light disappeared, but a moment after he saw the same glimmer through the blinds of what he knew was a rear hall.

Watching with intense interest Nick Norcross saw a few moments after the same dim glimmer of light in the hall window of the second floor.

"After all that house *is still occupied*," said Nick to himself.

"Who else can it be than Merton Sanford?"

"Would any one else dare come here but he?"

"We searched that house pretty thoroughly to-night, and that proves there is some hiding-place there we have not found, and I have heard that old-time houses have secret closets in them and this one may too have one.

"Well, if he is there he will remain in hiding I am sure, for I would not wish to venture in alone, at least to-night, and I do not care to take my ferrets without first reporting my discovery to Mr. Doom, for I want no more killing on my hands if it can possibly be avoided."

So musing, Nick carefully closed the window, replaced the blanket and returned to his bed to at once sink to sleep.

The dawn was breaking when he awoke, and going into the room which he had passed through during the night, he found there a number of youths, ranging from twelve to twenty years of age, as far as appearances went.

They were just turning out from their blanket beds, spread upon the floor, and preparing for the duties of the day.

"Boys, there is work ahead for us, and I want all but two of you to go into the city to-day and run to earth all you can find that is going wrong, and what the crooks are doing."

"All right, Cap'n Nick," said one, and the boys hastened to dress, some of them slipping out of the window by the rope-ladder, and stealing away from the stable along the shore, and others going down-stairs and leaving through a trap in the flooring, which let them down into a boat tied beneath the wharf.

Passing the boat out through the piling they pulled rapidly away toward the city.

Two of the young ferrets remained in the stable, and after giving them some directions, with regard to going into the end overlooking the house and boring gimlet-holes to keep a watch upon it, Nick Norcross took his departure, the rope-ladder being drawn up when he had descended, and the lake window closed.

A row of bushes ran along at one end of the stable, and creeping along in the shelter of these, Nick gained the concealment of the dense foliage in the garden and made his way out of the grounds, glad to discover that no one was yet abroad in the early morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.

DICK DOOM and Justin Keener talked over the events of the day and night until a late hour after returning to the hotel, and the detective said, as he at last came to a decision:

"Yes, Mr. Keener, I will start for New York to-morrow to trace your trunk at that end, for I have discovered that it was brought directly from the depot here to the hotel."

"As to that I cannot vouch, sir, for I stopped over a day at Buffalo; but I think that the change must have been made there, or in New York."

"No, it was made here, for with the temperature of our present weather, the body

could never have been brought even from Buffalo here and you not have noticed it the moment you opened the trunk."

"Yes, that is so."

"The exchange of trunks was made here, and the girl was killed here, and only a few hours before your arrival."

"Then why go to New York?"

"To trace the *two* trunks from there."

"Ah!"

"You arrived here on an early morning train?"

"Yes, at eight o'clock."

"Then that trunk with the body was here awaiting your arrival, and the man who was the spy on you, and arranged the plot of exchange, came on with you."

"It may be."

"It must be. Did you observe any one of a suspicious nature with your train?"

"Now I recall it, there was a man on the train to Buffalo, and I afterward saw him at the hotel there, and again on the train from there to Chicago."

"Describe him, please."

"He was a thick-set man, with black hair and beard, and looked like a sea-captain; in fact, he told me that he was a sailor returning home, in the few words I had with him."

"Did you notice any peculiarity about him?"

"Yes, he had a *gold* tooth, I noticed, and I also observed that he had lost a finger."

"Which finger?"

After a moment of thought Justin Keener replied:

"It was the first finger of his right hand, I now recall."

"Anything else?"

"He wore a ruby *solitaire* in his black scarf."

These marks of identification Dick Doom jotted down and then getting the address of the baggage Express company from Justin Keener, with the date of sending his trunk to the depot, and where they had to send for it, the detective said:

"Well, I shall take an early train to New York and pick up the trail there."

"Nick will report to you daily, so you in turn report to the chief, but unless anything of an important nature turns up await my return before taking any decided step, for should our man get alarmed he may leave the city, and I am anxious to get the King Bee and the rest of the hive this time."

"You are right, and I will go slow," answered Justin Keener, and bidding the detective good-by and wishing him success he went to his own room.

When, at ten o'clock Nick Norcross appeared, his face clouded as he heard from Justin Keener that Dick Doom had gone to New York, and he said:

"I am awful sorry that I did not get to see him, Mr. Keener, for I have made a discovery that is important."

"Mr. Doom said that you would report to me, and I would make anything known to the chief."

"I'll tell you, sir, but I think it best not to tell the chief, for, in Mr. Doom's absence, he would send his men to work it up, and they might ruin all, or at any rate we ferrets and the detectives would get no credit for what we had discovered."

"All right, Nick, we will keep it to ourselves."

"Yes, sir, for I'll keep a close watch, and if we have to act, why my Night Owls, as the Boy Ferrets now call our band, will act, and do good work too."

"I have no doubt of that, Nick; but I hope it will keep until Mr. Doom's return, for he wishes to make a clean sweep when he strikes a blow, and he has gone to New York to begin at the other end of the trail."

"But what was your discovery?"

"Well, sir, you know we went through the Marlborough mansion last night?"

"Yes, from cellar to garret."

"Did we not make a thorough search?"

"I think so, and I know that Dick Doom had the idea we did."

"Well, sir, when I went to my den I could not sleep, and getting up half-opened the window, and I saw a light in the mansion."

"Indeed?" and Justin Keener betrayed his surprise.

"Yes, sir, I watched it and saw it flash in the hall window on the floor below the one where I first saw it."

"It was not imagination, Nick?"

"No, sir; and I take no stock in ghost stories, sir."

"How do you account for it?"

"The house is occupied, sir."

"But no one dares go there, it is said."

"There is one who dares go there, sir."

"You mean Sanford?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you have gone there, Nick."

"And will again, sir, only I do not wish to make a move without Mr. Doom, unless it is necessary, so what would you advise, sir?"

"Keep a watch on the place day and night, and if you see any one enter, or leave it, capture them, for you must keep enough of your men on hand to do the work."

"If you do not see any one arrive or depart, await Dick Doom's return, for he expects to be back within four days."

"I'll do this, sir, and when my boys return to the den to-night, I'll keep them there and on watch day and night."

"Do so, and you will doubtless solve the mystery of the light, while, if you should need me, come for me, and, now I think of it, I wish you would come each day and help me pick up some clue to the murder of that poor girl at this end of the trail, for here is where she was killed."

"So I think, sir, and I'm your man for anything, Mr. Keener," was Nick's prompt reply.

CHAPTER XIV.

DICK DOOM'S UNERRING TRAIL.

DICK DOOM arrived promptly in New York and went at once to a hotel on Union Square, where Justin Keener made his quarters when in the city.

He had a line of introduction from the actor, and was most cordially received, and, as he desired to stop there, he was given the rooms occupied by Justin Keener, and which were most pleasant ones.

Having won the regard of Mr. Smidt by having a letter from the actor, Dick Doom told him that he was anxious to recover Justin's trunk, which had been stolen from him, and he wished all the information he could get from him regarding all who had visited the comedian.

Landlord Smidt recalled person after person who had called upon the popular actor, but to all Dick Doom shook his head until at last he made known that a trunk man had called to fix the lock of Justin Keener's trunk.

This circumstance Justin Keener had not spoken of to Dick Doom, and as the man had called when the actor was away, he asked all particulars of his visit, what he did when there and how long he remained.

At last Dick Doom gleaned the information that Justin Keener had sent for a locksmith, who had called to fix the lock on his trunk, and had done so, after remaining half an hour at work.

Dick Doom at once went out and sent the following dispatch:

"Did you order locksmith to your room, three days before leaving New York, to fix your trunk?"

The answer came in two hours:

"No, nothing the matter with trunk."

"JUSTIN KEENER."

Armed with this response Dick Doom looked in the Directory, for all the locksmiths in the city, and with a long list in his hand sprung into a hack and started upon the rounds to visit them.

After a half day's search, over on Ninth avenue he found a locksmith who recalled having sent a man to the hotel to fix a trunk.

The man was called, and closely questioning him Dick Doom gleaned the information that the man had gone to the room of Justin Keener, and he had the card with name and address in his pocket!

The card read:

"Go to Smidt's Hotel, Union Square, ask for Justin Keener, the actor's room, and say you are to fix a trunk."

"Take exact measurement of trunk, style, name on it, straps, and all that is noticeable so as to reproduce its counterpart, so that the sample key will fit both."

"Now, my man," said Dick Doom, "you have gotten yourself into serious trouble, and there is but one way out of it."

"Oh, sir, I meant no wrong, and I'll do anything I can if you'll not give me any trouble."

"Your pass sent you there to do some work, and the man who employed you paid you well to duplicate that trunk as far as you were able to do so, without leaving the two together."

"You got a trunk as near like it as you could, made certain alterations to make it more so, put a lock on it to match the one on Mr. Keener's trunk, and delivered the counterpart to your employer."

"Is this not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much did he give you?"

"Sixty dollars, sir, and the copy trunk cost twenty."

"And then?"

"I delivered it to him, sir."

"When?"

"The day after I was there."

"Where?"

"At the Astor House, sir."

"Well?"

"He paid me more to go out and buy something to make the trunk weighty."

"And then?"

"I left, sir."

"Now describe the man."

"He was a thickset man, with black beard and whiskers, and dressed as a sailor, sir."

"You would know him if you saw him again?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Did you see any one with him?"

"Yes, sir; a man came in to tell him that somebody, I did not hear who, would leave for Chicago by a certain train, and his ticket was taken to allow a stop over in Buffalo."

"Well, my man, you return to your work, but be ready to come to me immediately if you get a telegram from me, and you shall be paid well for your services, for unintentionally on your part, you have helped in a great wrong."

"You will do as I tell you?"

"Oh, yes, sir, gladly."

And Dick Doom left the locksmith with a very confident look upon his face.

CHAPTER XV.

COURSING FOR A CROOK.

HAVING secured the name of the man the locksmith had served so well, Dick Doom went to the Astor House and asked to see "Mr Ford Saunders of Detroit."

He did not expect to find the man there, so was not disappointed when told that he had gone on a certain date.

Taking the clerk, apparently, into his confidence, Dick Doom told him that there was a great surprise in store for Mr. Ford Saunders, hinting that it was an inheritance, and representing himself as a lawyer's clerk he got what information he wished, as to where

the baggage had been taken, when the guest left the hotel, and also what train he had gone on.

He jotted in his note-book the information he picked up, and saw that it was the very train taken by Justin Keener the comedian.

Having finished his work in New York, he returned to Joe Smidt's, paid his bill and took the first train for Buffalo, arriving there the next morning early.

Going to the Tift House where Justin Keener had stopped when there, Dick Doom discovered on the register the name of "Ford Saunders," but this time the address given was not Detroit, but Chicago.

Taking the same train out, which Justin Keener had, Dick Doom, by closely questioning the crew, and showing his authority for doing so, discovered that the exchange of trunks had surely been made in Chicago, and not on the train, for the stop-over of the actor in Buffalo for twenty-four hours had caused his baggage, checked through as it was, to arrive at its destination a day and night in advance of his arrival.

Having learned from the conductor that the "man in the sailor togs, thick-set in form, and with black hair and beard," was on the train with Justin Keener all the way to Chicago, Dick Doom felt that he was now on the right track, and upon arriving in the Western metropolis had only to find the whereabouts of the man he had shadowed from the Astor House in New York, to find the guilty slayers of the young girl whose body had been found in Justin Keener's trunk.

He at once wired the actor on the way:

"Will arrive at six. The sailor is the man. Meet me at depot with Nick."

Justin Keener got this telegram after Nick's morning visit to him, so he took the Illinois Central out to Hyde Park, and then set out on foot to go to the Marlborough mansion, asking several persons he met regarding the sale and price of property in that neighborhood.

Coming in sight of the mansion, he strolled leisurely along the shore, made his way into the grounds, and looked about with the air of one who wanted to buy property, and finding the place deserted, had ventured in.

Reaching the pier near the stable, he hummed an air to attract attention, and stepping to the corner of the building, stood looking out over the lake.

He knew that sharp eyes were upon him from within the stable, and if Nick had returned to his retreat, he would be recognized and a way found to communicate with him.

He was right, for the lake window opened cautiously and a head peered out, while a voice called:

"I am here, Mr. Keener. I just returned by boat; but there may be some one in the mansion on the watch."

"Yes, Nick, I'll not remain, but come to tell you to meet me at the hotel at five."

"I'll be there, sir," and the window closed, while Justin Keener strolled leisurely about the grounds, whistling "Comrades," and appearing to be only intent upon examining the beauties of the old home and its surroundings.

At last he left, and walking across to the cable car took it back to the city.

Sharp at five Nick Norcross knocked at the actor's door and was admitted.

"I had this telegram from Dick Doom, Nick, so went to look you up."

The youth took the telegram read it over carefully and said:

"Mr. Doom is on the right track sure, and that means that he will get his man as sure as death."

"So I think, Nick; but now we will go to the depot and meet him," and the two left the hotel together.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHADOWING.

THE train came in on time, and Dick Doom got off, sachel in hand, gave a glance of recognition only to Justin Keener and Nick Norcross, and then passed on into the baggage-room.

He went to the head "baggage-smasher" and said:

"A word with you, please."

"I am busy now."

"You are not too busy to attend to me, sir. See!"

He showed his badges of Secret Service, his diamond badge of the United States Secret Bureau, causing the man to quickly say:

"I can give you a few minutes, sir."

"On the date of this paper a gentleman arrived on the morning train from New York, handed his check to an expressman, and went to his hotel."

"Half an hour after a trunk arrived, and in appearance similar to his."

"His key unlocked it, by a strange coincidence, but it was not his trunk."

"He had stopped over in Buffalo twenty-four hours, so his trunk came on that much ahead of him."

"With these facts, I wish you to find out where his trunk was taken, and how the checks became mixed."

"Has the owner of the other trunk not appeared in search of his baggage?"

"You should know that if he had; but he does not want his trunk, preferring the other."

"That means that the exchange was *purposely* made."

"It does."

"That is strange."

"It would be if one of your men had not been bribed on the train, or here, to make the exchange."

"But we employ only honest men."

"So they do in banks and other important positions; but when tempted, men fall, and I have never yet known a corporation that had not some rogues employed in it."

"What do you wish me to do, sir?"

"My idea is that both trunks came through together, and that one was taken away from here during the day of its arrival."

"Yes, sir."

"Find out to whom the through trunks from New York were delivered, and let me know at once, but no attention must be attracted to your search more than is necessary."

"When do you wish an answer, sir?"

"Now."

"Can you give me a description of the trunk?"

"A description of one describes both, and here it is written down."

The man took the slip of paper, read it over carefully and went on his mission.

In half an hour he returned and said:

"Both of the trunks described came in at the same time, and were noticed on account of their similarity."

"Well?"

"One was taken away by a hackman, who called with the check for it, some two hours after the arrival of the train."

"And the other?"

"Was taken by a baggage Express to a hotel in the city."

"When, and to what hotel?"

"Here is the name, and it was on the day after its arrival that it was taken away."

"Send some of your men to find out who the hackman was."

The man did so.

"Now let me tell you that the exchange of those checks was made on the train after leaving Buffalo."

"It would seem so, sir."

"Could a passenger enter the baggage car?"

"Possibly, but not to make an exchange of checks."

"That means that a baggage-man did it?"

"Perhaps, through a porter of the sleeper, a brakeman, or maybe the conductor might have been inveigled into it by a passenger who told him that he wished to have one trunk lay over, and the other checked on, and had made a mistake in packing them."

"True, but might a passenger also have bribed the baggage-man?"

"It might be, sir, though, with the same name on each trunk, and the trunks just alike, he need not bribe him, as they would seem to be his own."

Dick Doom was silent a moment, and then said:

"See here, the exchange of those checks was made *before* the train reached Buffalo, not after, now I come to think of it, and the check for the trunk to be stolen was the only one delivered here, but *both* trunks went away from this office, and one was kept, the other returned."

"That cannot be, sir."

"Why?"

"Only one trunk would be delivered on one check."

"Look here, sir."

"The man who had those checks changed, knew the number on both."

"He sent the one check on to Chicago by mail, with a special stamp, of this I am assured, and the receiver of that check at once had a similar one made with the number of the other one upon it."

"The hackman who called for the trunk a couple of hours after the arrival of the train, got *both* of them."

"I can barely believe this, sir."

"But he did, and you will find that some time the night following one of those trunks was brought back and left here, with some excuse for the taking of it away."

"Investigate this at once, and thoroughly, find the guilty man in your employ who was acting for a bribe, and report to me at my hotel the moment you make the discovery, which you *must* make."

"Also let me know who the hackman was that took the trunks away."

"I shall look for you to-night, no matter what the hour," and Dick Doom walked away and joined Justin Keener and Nick outside where they were waiting for him.

CHAPTER XVII.

DICK DOOM'S CLETER WORK.

THE detective greeted Justin Keener and Nick warmly, and entering a carriage the three were driven to the post-office.

Dick Doom at once sought the chief clerk of the special delivery stamp department and, showing his badge of authority asked to see the record of special letters mailed from Buffalo on a certain date.

They were shown him, and they were over a hundred in number.

He went carefully over the list and found one stamped as mailed on the postal car at Buffalo.

It had been delivered at a certain number, in an obscure street not far from the post-office, and within an hour after its reception at the office.

Dick Doom took down the date, time of delivery, street and number, and seemed to care for none of the other special letters on the list.

Thanking the clerk he returned to his carriage and said:

"Drive slowly through Plymouth Place."

The driver did so and Dick Doom watched the numbers until his eyes fell upon one that he was in search of.

Then he ordered the driver to take them to the hotel, and once in his rooms he said:

"Well, my good allies, my trip has been a successful one."

"I am rejoiced to hear that, Mr. Doom,

and you certainly have made quick work of it," Justin Keener replied.

"I got upon the right trail from your friend's house, Joe Smidt, Mr. Keener, found the man who came under pretense of mending your trunk."

"Which I knew nothing about."

"So Mr. Smidt said; but he got the measure, style, name and all needed to make, or buy a similar trunk, and was employed to do so by a man stopping at the Astor House by the name of Ford Saunders."

The story of the shadowing was then told, and up to the interview with the baggage-master, and then Dick Doom continued:

"Now, through that special delivery letter I have found out where the man sent the check, for the clerk remembered that the letter contained a hard substance within it which was marked 'Brass Die.'"

"I now am waiting for the baggage-man with his report, and I venture to assert that, with the connivance of the one on duty the second trunk was removed by night from the depot, and returned before dawn, and it held the body of the murdered girl, and whose life had been taken meanwhile."

"And at the place where the letter was delivered?" asked Justin Keener.

"I am not so sure of that, but, if the trunks were taken to the same place that the letter was, the hackman will know."

"If he can be found."

"He will be, Mr. Keener, for if they cannot find him at the baggage-room, I'll start Nick here and his ferrets out with the number of every hack in the city and in a couple of days they will have discovered every fare each one of them had on the day and night in question, for it is not likely that the hackman was in the secret, or the same driver brought the trunk back who took it away."

"You are the very man for a detective, Mr. Doom," said Justin Keener, with real admiration at the skill of Dick Doom.

"Yes, I believe that I was born with a talent for Secret Service work, and which was developed by the need of it in my own life," was the reply of the detective, and both Justin Keener and Nick noticed the sad look that came over the face of the "Ferret of the Golden Fetters," as he was often called by his professional brothers, from the fact that he always carried a pair of solid gold manacles.

Quickly throwing off the sadness that had swept over him, recalled by some memory of his past life, Dick Doom said:

"It is time I heard from the baggage-master, for he has had a chance before this to find out the hackman who had carried the trunk, or trunks away from the depot."

Hardly had he finished speaking when a bell-boy came up with the card of the man whom the detective was anxiously expecting.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOY FERRETS ON THE TRAIL.

"Show the gentleman up," said Dick Doom, and turning to Justin Keener and Nick Norcross he continued:

"Please step into the other room, but do not close the door, and make no sound to betray your presence there."

The actor and the ferret obeyed, and soon after the baggage-master entered.

"Be seated, Mr. Lefler; I suppose you come with news for me, the news that I want?"

"I am afraid not, sir, for I can find no trace of the hackman."

"Did your men try?"

"They did, sir, but said that the man came from some place across the town and was not known to any of the people at the depot, for I questioned them all myself."

"I am sorry about this."

The visitor made no reply, and looked

like one who had done his duty and wished to go.

But, Dick Doom was not to let him off until he had reached bed-rock facts, so he said:

"You have something else to report, Mr. Lefler?"

The man's face flushed and paled by turns, and he made no reply.

"Your finding the hackman, Mr. Lefler, was but half of the work I gave you to do."

"What else did you wish of me, sir?"

"Are you not aware that both of those trunks were taken from the depot, and one returned in time to be on hand when the check for it was presented?"

"Well, yes, sir, this was the case."

"One of your own men allowed this."

"Do you know this?" quickly asked the baggage-master.

"You will find out how much more I know, sir, if you do not at once state the facts as *you* know them," sternly responded the detective.

"Pardon me, sir, but I hesitated to tell all, from compassion for one who is dear to me."

"Who is that one?"

"My brother, sir."

"He has charge of the baggage at night?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was bribed to allow that trunk to be taken away, and when returned to put the same check upon it?"

"You know all then, sir?"

"Tell me the truth."

"Well, sir, my brother is years younger than I am, a mere boy. He has been a wild young fellow, giving us all much sorrow and trouble."

"But, he reformed and came to me for work over a year ago. I got him on as brakeman, then as assistant hand with the baggage, and at last put him on as night man in the luggage room."

"And he betrayed your trust?"

"Well, sir, I went to him, and as though I knew all about it, told him a trunk had been taken away and brought back during the night, when the same check had been put on it again."

"He broke down then and confessed that he had been bribed to allow it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say?"

"He said that a gentleman came to him and told him he had a friend coming on to be married, and that he, as a present, wished to give him a number of things which he desired to put in his trunk without his knowing it, and he offered him fifty dollars to allow a hackman to take the baggage away, promising to return one trunk within a few hours."

"I see his game," quietly said Dick Doom.

"Tempted by the fifty dollars, poor Fred consented, and the trunk was called for by a hackman, but returned just before day-break by another one."

"And he did not know either of these hackmen?"

"He swears that he does not, sir, and in this I believe him."

"Mr. Lefler, say nothing more to your brother upon this subject, nor to any one else, and let it appear as though it was done with."

"But keep your eye upon your brother, as I may need his testimony, and I'll be very lenient with him."

"I thank you for what you have done, but remember, this is a dead secret until I give you authority to speak."

"I'll not forget it, sir," said Mr. Lefler, and he took his leave.

As soon as the door closed behind him Dick Doom called his allies into the room, and said:

"You see how matters are shaping themselves; but, Nick, I want both the hackmen,

the one who took the trunk from the depot, and the man who returned it."

"I'll find them both, Mr. Doom."

"All right, go at once and get the numbers of the hacks and the addresses of the drivers, and start your ferrets at work running them down at daylight."

"I'll do it, sir," and Nick was off like a flash on his mission, and the next morning the Boy Ferrets were on the trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

FORGING THE CHAIN.

THE day following the return of Dick Doom from New York, Justin Keener went over to the post-office to mail an important letter, and crossing Plymouth place the idea occurred to him that as the special letter containing the trunk check had been mailed to that street, the one who sent after the trunks would doubtless go to the hack-stand nearest to where he lived.

So he went along the row of vehicles questioning each driver as to his having on a certain day, or night, carried a trunk to a house on Plymouth place.

To his great delight he found a man who said that he had been hired by a gentleman late one night to take a trunk from Plymouth place to the depot.

Ascertaining the number, and discovering that the date was the very night that the trunk had been taken away and returned, Justin Keener hastened back to the hotel and found Dick Doom in his rooms.

"I have made the half of a discovery for you, at least, Mr. Doom," he said.

"Out with it, friend Keener," said the detective cheerily, and he added:

"It may fit in with the news just brought me by Nick Norcross, who came to report to me that he has found the hackman who carried the trunk away from the depot."

"Indeed! Did he take it to Plymouth place?"

"Yes."

"To the number you drove by to have a look at?"

"He did."

"Then I can complete the discovery, for I have found the hackman who carried the trunk back to the depot."

"Good!"

"That completes the chain of evidence, and now we are to find the murderer," said Dick Doom, and he heard from Dick Doom all that he had been told by the hackman, whose name, address and number were given him by the actor.

"Nick's hackman came from the stand at the Polk street depot, Mr. Keener, and neither of the two drivers suspected any plot in their work."

"They were both engaged by an old gentleman, with gray hair, beard, and glasses, and who stooped in his walk, swung a gold-headed cane, for such is the description your man gives."

"Yes, and Nick's driver gives the same, I see."

"Exactly; so we have the evidence of Joe Smidt of the coming of the trunkman to your rooms, the man who got the model of your trunk, the Astor House Register upon which is the name of Ford Saunders, the fact that the checks were changed on the train before reaching Buffalo, that one was mailed to Chicago, and delivered on Plymouth place, being receipted for by an old gentleman with gray hair and beard, and who stooped in the shoulders, and who signed the name of the address on the envelope, which was that of M. S. Ford, which might, you see, stand for Merton Sanford."

"How you do get at bed-rock facts of a case, Mr. Doom," said Justin Keener with a smile.

"Practice makes perfect, it is said, Mr. Keener."

"But, to continue, we have evidence from the baggage-master's brother that he did allow both trunks to leave his keeping, one of which was taken and returned by night, and that an old gentleman paid him the bribe, while the two hackmen also give their statement as to their having been engaged by an old gentleman, and each went to the same address to leave the trunk and to take it away."

"The chain is being slowly but surely forged, Mr. Doom, in your clever hands," said the actor.

"Yes, but now we have to find the murderer, for that trunk went there to that address with only the weighty material put in it by the trunkmaker in New York, and it left the house with the dead body of the young girl whom you found in it."

"By a strange coincidence, the address on Plymouth place is just three doors from the house in which I found Sanford before, him and his allies, who were crooks and counterfeiters, burglars and pickpockets, as well as confidence-men: we made a great haul that night of crooks, Nick and his ferrets aiding me, Mr. Keener."

"The house is now unoccupied, but I am sure that it has some secret passageway underground, perhaps, with the one now occupied by that old gentleman, who may or may not be Merton Sanford in disguise."

"I have made inquiries, and find that the house is occupied by a widow and her daughter, who is said to be insane, but little is known of them in the neighborhood, and they are said to be harmless people, but that all may only be a blind."

"It maybe; but how would it do for me to go there and try and get board, telling them who I am, and that I am organizing a dramatic company?"

"The very thing, for you are keen by nature as well as by name, and once in the house could discover at a glance much that might help us, while, if they take you in as a boarder then they are not guilty themselves, though their boarder, the pretended old man, is."

"It would seem so, and I will go at once and try the board racket," and Justin Keener started off muttering to himself:

"I rather like this playing detective, though I would prefer it to be a comedy to a tragedy, which the death of that poor girl makes it."

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

JUSTIN KEENER went to the number of the mysterious house, where the old man lived, and in answer to his ring, a woman came to the door, neatly dressed but with a sad look upon her motherly face.

"Pardon me, madam, but I am looking for a pleasant boarding-place, and I was told that you took boarders," said the comedian, politely.

"I have only my upper floor, sir, and that is occupied."

"I am sorry, madam, for I desired to get into this locality. I am an actor and this is convenient to my work."

"An actor, sir?"

"Yes, I am Justin Keener, the comedian, madam."

"Justin Keener, the comedian?" and the woman's face brightened.

"Yes, madam."

"My son was an actor, sir."

"Who is your son, may I ask?"

"He knew you, Mr. Keener, for I have heard him speak of you; but, he is dead now. His name was Carrol Caradine."

"Ah, yes, I knew him well. He was lost at sea, poor fellow."

"Yes, two years ago; but, I am glad to meet you. Come in."

Justin Keener entered the house; and was led into a cozy little parlor.

"I own this house, Mr. Keener, and had it rented to men who I had reason to believe were a wicked lot."

"They also had a house near here, only a few doors away, and they held regular communication by way of the roofs, going in and out by way of the skylights, and over the adjoining houses."

"The other house was raided by the police, and mine was deserted that very night and left on my hands, so I came with my daughter and took possession of it, as it was rented furnished."

"And you have boarders now?"

"Only one, now, an old gentleman, who came here and engaged rooms for himself and daughter, paying me a large price on condition that I would take no one else."

"And they are with you now?"

"No, the daughter was called suddenly away some days ago her father told me, and a few days after he left, leaving a note that he would be away also a little time, but to keep all as left by him until I had a message from him, and he would pay all expenses just as though he was here."

"So this prevents you from taking me as a boarder, Mrs. Caradine?" said Justin Keener.

"Yes, Mr. Keener, and I am sorry; but, if he does not keep his floor after the month, I would like to have you here."

"Could you not give me a room on the second floor, or this one?"

"You know my contract with Mr. Ford forbids."

"Mr. Ford?"

"The old gentleman I spoke of."

"Oh, yes."

"Then, too, I have an invalid daughter, and need all of my second floor for our use."

"I will urge no more, Mrs. Caradine; but in case Mr. Ford may not return, will you kindly let me have a look at his rooms, just so as to know whether I will hold on and await his return, to see if he gives them up."

The woman hesitated and then said:

"He has a private pass-key upon his doors, but when he left the lock did not catch as he supposed, so I can show you what the rooms are," and Mrs. Caradine led the way up to the third floor.

There were on this floor a parlor, two bedrooms and bath-room, all comfortably furnished.

"This room off the parlor Miss Ford occupied, and the rear room was the old gentleman's, and they had the parlor together."

Justin Keener's eyes had quickly taken in the rooms, the furniture and all else.

But suddenly his gaze became riveted upon a large photograph upon the wall.

It was of a young girl, and he stopped in front of it, gazing intently.

"That is Miss Ford's face, sir. Is she not beautiful?"

"Very," muttered the actor.

"And as good as she is beautiful," continued Mrs. Caradine.

"Do you know I think she has been an actress?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I thought so from several remarks I heard her make."

"Do you like the rooms, Mr. Keener?"

"Very much, Mrs. Caradine, and I will see you again, while I am certainly glad to have met you," and thanking her for her kindness Justin Keener left the house wearing on his face a smile that was unfathomable.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DETECTIVE IN SKIRTS.

JUSTIN KEENER entered the rooms of Dick Doom with the air of a man who held the key to a puzzle.

In an instant the detective read in his

face that he had something to tell, and he said:

"Well, Mr. Keener, what luck?"

"I discovered in the landlady in the House of Mystery, the mother of an old friend, an actor, who was lost at sea—poor Carrol Caradine."

"Then, as I surmised, she is not a guilty party."

"She certainly is not, sir, but you shall hear all."

The story was told, and Dick Doom gave a low whistle and said:

"Yes, when we pulled one house the birds flew out of the other, and the communication between the two was by way of the roofs and scuttles."

"That was it."

"And Mrs. Caradine has an invalid daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any servant?"

"No, sir, and I remember she said she wanted one, but a faithful girl she had been unable to secure thus far."

"Mr. Keener, I know one you can recommend to her, and to-morrow you must write her a note telling her you know of an honest, good girl who wants a home rather than wages."

"You know of such a girl Mr. Doom?"

"Yes, the very girl for her."

"All right, sir, I'll write the letter."

"I'll have the girl call on you to get the letter; but you say the old gentleman's name is Ford?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that he put a secret lock on the doors of his rooms?"

"Yes."

"But he left it unlocked by accident?"

"So Mrs. Caradine said."

"You have something else to tell, Mr. Keener."

"We know that the old man's name is Ford, and he signed for the special delivery letter."

"Very true."

"Well, to come out with my secret, I saw Miss Ford's photograph in the room."

"Yes."

"It is the very image of the dead girl whose body was put in the trunk."

"I expected as much; but you say the old man has left?"

"Only for a few days."

"Are you sure?"

"So Mrs. Caradine said, and his rooms look as though they had been left only temporarily."

"This may be a blind, and yet he may have left only from fear that he might be suspected, and would absent himself until reassured, and I trust it is so, though, if he does not return there, I think from what Nick reported to you about the mysterious light seen in the Marlborough mansion, while I was away, that we will know where to look for our man."

"I see the drift you are taking, Mr. Doom, and I will write Mrs. Caradine a warm recommendation of the girl you wish to send to her," said the actor with a smile.

"You are certain about the photograph being one of the young girl who was murdered?"

"Beyond all doubt," answered the actor, and as Dick Doom had an engagement with the chief of the Secret Service he took his departure to keep it.

The next morning Justin Keener was just finishing his toilet when the bell-boy came with a card for him which read:

"Please come to my room and you will find here the girl I spoke of."

"Give her a strong recommendation."

"I have an engagement but will see you later. D. D."

Justin Keener at once went to the parlor

of the detective and knocking at the door a feminine voice said:

"Come in!"

Entering he beheld a young girl with black hair, frizzled bangs, and dressed a trifle loud.

She had the appearance of a Bowery belle, and said with a decided brogue:

"Morning to yez, sur; be ye the gentleman as intinds to give me a character?"

Justin Keener has an appreciation of wit and fun, and amused at the girl he answered with his irresistible Dutch dialect so popular on the stage:

"Dat ish so, Fraulein; Iisht'e man you vas after."

"Vas you from t'e Faderland, leetle gal?"

"I is afther being Irish, sur."

"Dot vas all t'e same to dem as don't know different."

"But you wants a character, you vas tell me?"

"In faith I do that same, for I'm afther being a good, honest girril; but I lost me pocketbook the ither day and me character wid it."

"Oh Himmel! v'y don't you go find him?"

"But v'at vas your name so I gif you anoter one."

Sitting down at the desk Justin Keener muttered:

"I don't think Dick Doom has struck it rich in sending this Exile of Erin to act as a detective, she looks stupid."

But he wrote the letter of recommendation and turned to hand it to Maggie Maloney, when, to his surprise he saw her lighting a cigar from the detective's case.

"Miss Maloney!" cried the astounded actor, and the answer came:

"Well, Dutchy, don't you know me?"

"Dick Doom, by the gods of war!"

"Yes, *alias* Maggie Maloney."

"Will I do?"

Justin Keener looked bewildered for a moment and then burst out into a hearty laugh.

"Will you do?"

"Well I guess so, for anything you undertake; but do you mean, Dick Doom, that you intend to trace Mrs. Caradine as a servant girl?"

"It is just what I intend to do, for I have keys that will open every door, trunk and drawer in the house, and I will just see who and what old Mr. Ford is, and if Mrs. Caradine is guilty or not guilty, though I give her the benefit of not being."

"No, she is not an accomplice."

"So I hope and and believe, Mr. Keener; but I can find out all I wish to know, and you told me there was a hall room on Mrs. Caradine's floor unoccupied and that is doubtless where Maggie Maloney will be put."

"You remain here and keep your eyes open, but call daily upon Mrs. Caradine, from the friendship you had for her son, you know, and Nick will report daily to you, so we will be in constant communication with each other, for he will have his ferrets on the watch."

"Now I'll go and seek service with Mrs. Caradine," and Dick Doom soon left the hotel, carrying a sachel of clothes fitted for a female domestic, and leaving Justin Keener to watch events as they transpired.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

A SHORT while before Justin Keener went to Chicago, on his mission to look up the children of Ben Bancroft the actor, a gentleman was standing upon the lake front, gazing out over the waters from a point of observation in Lincoln Park.

He was a man beyond three-score years, bent in form, with rounded shoulders and his hair and beard were iron-gray.

Dressed well, he looked like a man of

wealth, and his gold-rimmed spectacles and massive, gold-headed cane helped to carry out the idea that he was well off in this world's goods.

Taking one of the rustic seats in the Park, he sat gazing out over the lake, while his thoughts seemed traveling backward into the bygone, for his face assumed a look as though he was dwelling upon bitter memories.

So wrapped up was he in his thoughts that he failed to see a lady approaching until she almost confronted him.

She was a young and a very beautiful girl, and her dress was rich and stylish.

As she came in front of him he looked up, gave a glance into her face and gave a cry of horror, while from his white lips came the words in tones of anguish:

"Great God, Estelle! Have you come from your grave to haunt me?"

The young girl started, her face flushed and paled, and then she drew nearer to him and said:

"My dear sir, did I startle you? I am very sorry."

"In God's name who are you?" gasped the old man.

"My name is Eleanor Enders, sir, and but now you called the name of my twin sister, Estelle, whom I came to Chicago to find."

The old man gave a deep sigh of relief, and, after an effort, said:

"Yes, you reminded me of my little Estelle."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are Eleanor Enders, her sister, of whom I have heard her speak so often? Sit down, my child, and let me talk to you."

The young girl slipped into a seat by his side, and said, softly:

"Then you will forgive me for frightening you as I did?"

"Oh, yes, do not speak of it, for I am not over strong."

"Pardon me, sir; then you knew my sister Estelle?"

The man looked at her and asked:

"Do you know where she is?"

"I do not, for I have not heard from her for two years."

"She was an actress, as I am. She went into a company, in which there was no place for me, and securing a large salary in a company going to Europe and then Australia, I took it, and thus we were separated, and it has been a long time since I have heard from her, being so far away."

"I went to our old boarding-place in New York, and they told me that she had left there long ago and had gone, they thought to Chicago."

"I came on here and have been trying to find her through the Dramatic Agencies. Mr. Arthur Cambridge, the agent, has been most kind in aiding me, though he can find no one bearing my sister's stage name in any of the companies on the road."

"She was known upon the stage as Hazel Harcourt, was she not?" asked the man in a low tone.

"She was, sir, and I took the stage name of Helen Harcourt, for we did not wish to be known either by our mother's name of Enders, or our father's name."

"His name was Bancroft."

"Yes, sir. You seem to know all about us."

"I'll tell you how I do."

"Your sister was taken ill here, and I felt interested in her."

"I was well off, she poor, and I had no family, so I showered upon her my affection, and at last prevailed upon her to give up the stage and allow me to adopt her as my own child."

"She felt grateful to me, and consented; but she had a great sorrow of some kind weighing her down all the time—had loved unworthily I fear, for of that she would never tell me."

"I did all in my power for her, but she grew more morose and gloomy day by day, until one night, some months ago, she went out rowing alone in a boat upon the lake, from this very Park, and the next morning she was found to have taken her own life."

The young girl had seemed to dread some terrible story, from the old man's look and manner, and prepared herself for the shock.

But her head was bowed, and while her whole frame shook with emotion she sobbed bitterly, murmuring again and again:

"My poor, poor sister! would that we had never parted! But, we did what we deemed was best to help our mother, in poverty in a foreign land."

"My child, your sister died no violent death, for she took chloroform and gently sunk into her last sleep, leaving only a line stating that no one was to blame."

"Poor Estelle!"

"Yes, and poor me, for I was left all alone; but a strange destiny seems to have guided you across my path, and you must not go against fate, but be my daughter as she was."

"I am an old man, rich in this world's goods, and you shall have all my fortune."

"Do not say nay, for you too are alone as I am."

"I await your answer."

"Heaven bless you, sir, and as you were so good to Estelle, you shall be my father too."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

"My child, here is a letter for you, that was forwarded from your old New York address."

The speaker was the old gentleman who had so strangely met the young actress in Lincoln Park some days before.

Accepting his kind offer of fatherly regard and desire to adopt her, as he had her sister, she had gone with him to her hotel, and arrangements were made for her to come to the house where he was then living upon the following day.

She was alone in the wide world, and the twin sister she had clung to was dead, had taken her own life, she had been told, and her brother had disappeared mysteriously years before, so that she had no one to love, no one to cling to, and her dread was of herself, that she might also be tempted to end her own life and thus rid herself of her sorrows and troubles.

So she gladly accepted the generous offer made her, feeling that she would be near one who had loved and cared for her sister, and would for her.

The next day she drove to the old man's home, and soon found herself the inmate of a cozy room with a pretty parlor adjoining, and her benefactor living near.

Her taste soon gave the rooms a different air, together with a number of little souvenirs she had in her trunk, and in a few days she felt at home and far less blue than she could have believed possible.

The landlady was most kind to her, her adopted father most devoted, and yet she felt that he was a man who had known some deep sorrow in his life.

She felt that it was her duty to be kind and good to him, and she so intended to be.

He had come in from a walk, and calling at her hotel had found a letter there for her, having been forwarded from New York.

The letter was from her mother, then dead, but it had followed her about from place to place and was covered with post-marks.

She had already learned of her mother's death, and now this came to her as a letter from the dead.

She turned pale when she saw the writing and trembled like a leaf.

"It is from my poor, dead mother, mailed

long ago and only now reaching me," she murmured.

Mr. Ford said some consoling words, and added:

"Read it, my child, and you will feel better over it."

She broke the seal and read the story which the reader has already heard, through Justin Keener the actor, and devoted friend of her father and mother, whose lives he had saved.

"Bless that noble man, for I have been told over and over again, when a little girl, how he risked his life to save my father and mother."

"Now this letter tells me that I am to be an heiress, and that the arrangement of all is left to Mr. Keener."

"Mother writes here that she will send to Mr. Justin Keener, who lives in New York, a letter explaining all and asking him to be as a father to Estelle and myself, and to look up also our brother, and that, after her death the papers will all be expressed to him, with her jewelry and other souvenirs, and the proof of our identity."

"Our brother, Bancroft, will really be the heir to the title and estates, and for poor Estelle and myself there will be a fortune also."

"Now it will come to you, that is, your sister's share," said Mr. Ford.

"I suppose so, sir."

"And have you no idea where your brother is?"

"Not the slightest, sir."

"That is too bad."

"And the papers and souvenirs were to be sent to the actor, Justin Keener?"

"So the letter states."

"His address is given, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; here it is in New York."

"And he will have complete control of you, and the getting of your fortune?"

"It appears so."

"Well, I will communicate with Mr. Keener at once, my child, and let him know where you can be found, while, when we meet him, we can tell him of your sister's sad death, and put our heads together to find your missing brother, or get proof of his death, if he is not living."

"You are so kind to me, my dear sir."

"No, I am only anxious to make you happy; but it pains me to feel that Mr. Keener may take you away from me."

"No, for I wish to stay near you and comfort you in your later years," was the prompt reply.

"Have you any objection to my seeing your letter, for I wish to secure Keener's address?"

"Not the slightest," and she handed over the letter, and reading it carefully Mr. Ford made a few notes from it, and said:

"Well, there is happiness in store for you after all, I am sure."

"Now I have some business to look after in town, so will be out several hours," and Mr. Ford left the house, leaving Eleanor Enders to muse over the strange events in her life, little dreaming then of the shadow of Death hanging over her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MASKED PLOTTERS.

A MAN sat by a window in a house fronting on the lake, and in a house that was occupied by the lower classes, I might say the toughest element in Chicago.

He was a man of thick-set frame, with intensely black eyes and beard, and a face that was far from prepossessing.

His room was meagerly furnished, with cot, bureau, table, and a couple of chairs, and a grip was on the floor already packed, as though he lived each day for a sudden leave.

The man was watching the shipping out upon the lake, so did not see a form come along the sidewalk and turn into the dingy hallway of the house in which he dwelt.

The man who entered the hallway wore a seedy suit of clothes, a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, walked with a shuffling gait, and was heavily bearded.

He ascended the stairs like one who knew just where he was going, and reaching the upper floor he gave a peculiar knock at the door of the room of the man seated in the window.

A moment after a voice within asked:

"How is it?"

Before replying the visitor took from his pocket a black mask and placed it upon his face.

Then he said:

"It is well."

"For me?"

"For you."

A bolt was shot back and the door opened, and the visitor saw that the one he had come to see was also masked.

He had put on his mask after the knock at his door.

"How are you, cap'n?"

"I am well, Number One, and have called to see you upon a matter of importance," replied the man addressed as "captain," calling the other "Number One," for that number was in red on the forehead of his black mask.

"Good! I hope there is money in it, for I am hard-up, or soon will be, cap'n."

"There is money in it, and plenty of it for you, if you do your work well."

"You know me, and what I will do."

"Yes, and so trust you."

"Our band of Vampires is nearly wiped out now, and—"

"It is very nearly wiped out, as you say, captain, for besides you and me, and say half a dozen others, the rest are behind the bars, caught in that raid upon our quarters in Plymouth place."

"Fortunately they did not know of the other house, and so we skipped out the next day and the remnant of the gang scattered, but I can call them together when you need them."

"I need only you, Number One."

"That means short division, and gives me more money."

"Yes."

"Then shout, cap'n, for I'm your man."

"You must go to New York."

"Good; it'll give me a rest from dodging in this city."

"You are to go upon a very important duty, Number One, but one which I believe you will successfully carry out."

"I'll do it."

"There you are to see a man, whom you have doubtless heard of, for he is an actor, a comedian of reputation by the name of Justin Keener."

"I know him—he plays in Dutch dialect."

"Yes."

"You will find him at the address written here, and he has, or will have in his possession soon, some very important papers and souvenirs, upon which a fortune hangs."

"I understand."

"He will have these in his room, and you must get possession of them in some way, even if you have to get hold of his trunk."

"Trust me."

"It may be that he intends to come on to Chicago to find the heirs to this fortune, and in that case you can readily get hold of his trunk, shadow him here, for you are the best crook detective in the Vampire band."

"I hain't slow."

"When you reach New York write me at once to the address here given, and keep me constantly posted of what you discover and do."

"I'll do it, cap'n; but am I to put out my own cash?"

"No, for here are two hundred and fifty dollars for you; pay liberally for what you wish to find out, and if you need more money wire me."

"And what do I get, cap'n, for myself?"
 "Carry the thing through to a successful finish for me, and you shall have big money."
 "Say five thousand?"
 "Yes, and more if you serve me faithfully."
 "I'll git there and no mistake."
 "I see you have written down my full instructions."
 "Yes, so there can be no mistake."
 "You are as cunning as a fox, as merciless as a wolf, and clever withal, so you are the man to do the work."
 "When will you be off?"
 "By to-night's train."
 "The sooner the better, and remember to keep me posted."
 "I'll not forget it, cap'n, and trust me to win the game for you, cost what it may, even if I have to stain a knife-blade to do it."
 "Be careful, for a mistake may cost a fortune."
 "I made one once and it made me what I am, so I'll make no more. Going?"
 "Yes, good-by and success to you," and the masked captain of the band of crooks known as the Vampires, passed out of the door, removing his mask once he got out into the hall.

CHAPTER XXV. SUSPICION AROUSED.

MR. FORD sat in his rooms reading a letter he had just received by special delivery from New York, for the post-mark of that city, was upon the envelope.
 A strange smile rested upon his face as he read the letter, and in his hand he held a brass trunk check, and fastened to it a piece of cardboard upon which was a number.
 The check and card had come neatly folded in the letter.
 Having read his letter over twice very carefully, Mr. Ford arose, put on his hat and went out.
 He went to the brass-cutter's and handing him the check asked to have one made just like it immediately, and the number on the card placed upon it.
 The man thought he could do the work at once for a little extra pay, and he promptly received a dozen times what his pay would have been, so set immediately to work upon it.
 Mr. Ford then gave the check to a hackman and sent him after the trunk it called for, while he returned to his home.
 Eleanor Enders was in the little parlor engaged in writing a letter when Mr. Ford returned.
 "To whom are you writing, my child?" he asked, with a look of suspicion crossing his face.
 "I am writing to Mr. Justin Keener, the actor."
 "But why, when I told you I had written?"
 "But *have* you written, sir?"
 "Do you doubt me?"
 "Why has no reply been received?"
 "I have had a reply, Eleanor."
 "And did not show it to me?" she said reproachfully.
 "I did not, for it would not be comforting to you."
 "And why?"
 "Because Mr. Keener refuses to take the trust your mother placed in him."
 "Refuses?"
 "So I said."
 "And why?"
 "He does not care to be bothered with hunting up heirs to a fortune which may exist only in your mother's mind, and in which if gained there is nothing for him to gain."
 "He said this?"
 "Yes."
 "Show me his letter."
 "I destroyed it."

"Mr. Ford, Mr. Justin Keener risked his life to save my parents, and he was always spoken of by them as a man with a great big heart and noble nature."
 "He would not, from what I have heard of him from those who know him best, willingly wound an orphan girl."
 "Well, so his letter said, and he turned over to me the papers, souvenirs and the right to control your interests in this matter."
 "Where are these papers and other things, sir?"
 "I expect them to arrive at any moment, for I have sent to the depot for them."
 "I wish to see them."
 "After I have looked them over, you may."
 Eleanor sighed and turned away, and after waiting for quite a while, and the trunk he had sent for not arriving, the old man arose anxiously, and soon after went out, for he feared some harm had befallen the baggage he so anxiously looked for.
 He had not been gone five minutes before Mrs. Casadine called out that there was an expressman at the door with a trunk for Mr. Ford.
 "Send it up," was the response, and the expressman and assistant came up with a large and very heavy trunk.
 The man explained that the hackman had broken down, by being run into by a wagon, and so had gotten him to bring the trunk on to its destination.
 The young girl paid the expressage, and the men left the room.
 A moment she gazed at the trunk and murmured:
 "Why, it has Mr. Justin Keener's name upon it."
 Then she stood still, gazing fixedly and lost in thought.
 At last she said in a decided way:
 "I have the right, for it is mine, and I will look at the contents, for I cannot but believe that he is deceiving me, since I made the discovery that I did."
 "Yes, I have lots of keys, and I'll see if I can fit one to the lock."
 She went into her room, took a bunch of keys from her sachel, selected one of a peculiar shape and tried it in the lock.
 "Why, this is fortunate, for the very first one fits," and she unstrapped the trunk and opened it.
 When she looked in at the contents, her face turned pale, and she said in a frightened tone:
 "Why, what does this mean, for there is a mystery here I must fathom?"

CHAPTER XXVI. A WOMAN AT BAY.

HAVING quickly glanced over the contents of the trunk, Eleanor Enders came to the conclusion to relock it and await future developments.
 Having so decided she relocked and strapped the trunk and had hardly taken her seat when in came Mr. Ford.
 He had an anxious look upon his face and said quickly:
 "Mrs. Caradine told me the trunk came soon after I went out to see why it was delayed."
 "Yes, I paid the expressage, and the man said that the hackman broke down."
 "All right."
 "Will you not open it now, so I can see what it contains?"
 "No, I will first look it over myself, and then show you what I deem you should see."
 "Mr. Ford, what do you mean by treating me as you do, for is not that my property in that trunk?"
 "It may lead to your securing property, but you are a child and in my keeping."
 "I am nearly nineteen, and only voluntarily in your care."

"I insist upon seeing the contents of that trunk, Mr. Ford."
 "You insist in vain until I have looked over it, and then, before you do so you must sign a paper giving me full power to act for you as your guardian," was the stern and determined response.
 There came a dangerous flash into the eyes of the young girl at these words, and she said in a voice full of earnestness:
 "I would die first."
 "I am a woman and have cared for myself for years, and I can do so again."
 "Do you defy me, girl?"
 "Mr. Ford, let us be frank with each other."
 "I wish to be."
 "I crossed your path in the strangest way possible."
 "It was a remarkable coincidence, our meeting as we did in Lincoln Park, and my startling you so by appearing before you."
 "It looked to me at first glance as though you held a guilty conscience, but when you told me that my sister had been as a daughter to you, when I heard your story, I almost loved you, as though you were indeed my father, and I trusted you, while, a poor orphan girl, without kindred and with few friends, subject to many temptations, I was glad of a haven of rest and came to your home."
 "You treated me kindly, yes, but you did not wish me to go out, kept the daily papers from me and played the petty tyrant."
 "Then too I discovered, when brought in close contact with you, that your beard, cleverly as it is put on to hide it, *is false*, and you wear a wig, though it would take the keenest of eyes to discover the cheat."
 "This looked like fraud to me, as though you were hiding your identity, perhaps was a fugitive."
 "I noted that your face was that of a young man, not an old one, though the *make-up*, as we say in the profession, was perfect."
 "I noticed that you never used your glasses indoors, even read without them, and yet never went out unless you put them on."
 "Your bearing was more erect, your step quicker in your rooms than elsewhere."
 "You see that I have observed you closely, and taken notice that though you never allowed me to read the papers you bought all of them and went through them thoroughly."
 "Do you wonder now that I am doubtful of you, and when you tell me that Mr. Justin Keener has written a letter that I must not see, that he has disregarded my dying mother's will and refused the trust imposed on him, I cannot but lose faith in you, especially when now you will not even open that trunk in my presence."
 "I tell you, Mr. Ford, you are not what you seem; you are, I verily believe, a fugitive from justice, and I will go to Mr. Arthur Cambridge, the dramatic agent here, and this very day claim his protection, explaining the situation fully to him."
 "I know that Mr. Cambridge will protect me and advise me for my good, while, if you are guilty of a plot against me, he will thwart you in your designs."
 "Now, Mr. Ford, we part."
 The man had listened with marked attention to the young girl's words, her flashing eyes, heaving bosom and flushed face showing to him that she intended to carry out her threat and go to Arthur Cambridge and tell him all.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIS EXPLANATION.

"THE girl will carry out her threat," muttered the man, as she ceased speaking,

and for a moment he looked anxious and almost frightened.

But then he said in a tone wholly devoid of being angry at what she had said to him:

"Sit down, Eleanor, and let me talk to you."

"No."

"I ask it, in fact demand it, for you owe it to me to listen to an explanation."

"What explanation can you make?" and she paused with her hat in her hand.

"I can make an explanation that will satisfy you, though I must break confidence to do so, and tell you a secret which I had intended you should not know until the proper time for you to hear it."

There was something in the man's manner that impressed the young girl in a way to believe that he spoke the truth; so she said:

"I will hear what you have to say; but let me repeat what I said, if you cannot clear up this mystery, I shall go to Mr. Cambridge at once and he shall know all, even if it causes you to suffer, for if you have deceived me you deserve to suffer."

"Sit down, Eleanor, and hear me, and if I fail to convince you of my truthfulness and regard for you, and of my desire to serve your interests only, then I will send for Arthur Cambridge, yes and Frank Beresford of the Alhambra Theater also, and let you make a clear statement before them of how you deem yourself abused and deceived, and then they will be my witnesses as well as yours in this case, for both are honorable men and can be trusted under any and all circumstances."

The allusion to Arthur Cambridge and Frank Beresford, by him, both gentlemen being known to Eleanor Enders, calmed in a measure her fears, and she said:

"I will hear all you have to say, Mr. Ford."

"In the first place," he began, after a moment of silence, as though not knowing just what to say, "let me tell you that I am not the old man I appear without closest inspection."

"I am a comparatively young man, and the disguise you see me assume is worn for a good purpose."

"I am not round-shouldered either, but being an expert in disguises I look what I try to represent myself, an old man."

"My disguise was assumed for a purpose, as I said, for I am a detective."

"A detective?"

"Yes, and one on a very intricate case."

"Have you ever heard of Dick Doom the detective?"

"Yes, I have heard of him as a most mysterious man, and novels have been written of his wonderful Secret Service work and adventures."

"That is the man, and I am he."

"But why deceive me?"

"For a good purpose."

"In the first place your sister Estelle was said to have committed suicide, and many so believe."

"And did she not?"

"No."

"You know this?"

"Yes."

"Is she, can she be alive, after you took me to a grave which you told me was hers?" cried the girl in an excited manner.

"No, she is dead."

"And did not commit suicide?"

"She did not."

"How did she die then?"

"She was murdered."

"Murdered, and by whom? for I will hunt him down!" and the eyes flashed once more.

"Be calm, for that is my duty."

"Ah! have I misjudged you after all."

"As to my motives, yes."

"I will listen patiently."

"I am on this case, I saw your sister in

life, and in death, and when you appeared before me I was startled beyond expression.

"I could not tell you who I was and what I was doing, and so I had to lie to you."

"I did lie in telling you your sister was my adopted daughter; but I wanted you near me to the better aid me in my work of detection."

"I had the things which belonged to your sister here, for the chief of the Secret Service Bureau had turned them over to me to also aid me, and this added to your belief that your sister had been under my guardianship."

"I learned that there was an inheritance, and I wished to know every crook and turn in the case, and I expected to get much from you to help me."

"I am on the track of the murderer of Estelle, and I will soon hunt him down."

"Heaven grant it; but if you fail, I swear to you that I will devote my life to bringing him to the gallows," and there was a world of revenge in the threat.

"I will find him, and with your aid."

"As I told you, I had written to Justin Keener, and I have heard from him."

"He sent me that trunk, and it contains papers, souvenirs and other things belonging to your parents, but I did not wish you to see them, for you did not know my secret then."

"To-night, Eleanor, we will look them over together."

"I have wronged you, and cruelly—forgive me," said the young girl, and she held out her hand and it was warmly grasped with the words:

"Yes, I will forgive you, and we will never misunderstand each other after to-night."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STRANGE VISITOR.

THAT evening Eleanor Enders did not come down to supper, Mr. Ford stating to Mrs. Caradine that she was suffering with a severe headache.

He however took her tea up to her himself, and gave the landlady to understand that his daughter was going away for a short while and would make an early start in the morning.

Soon after taking Eleanor's supper up Mr. Ford left the house, and when he returned he came in a hack and had a trunk with him.

The trunk was taken up-stairs, and the hackman was told to wait.

This he did for an hour or more, and then the trunk was carried back down-stairs and placed upon the vehicle, Mr. Ford paying a man to help the hackman with it.

The next morning when Mrs. Caradine arose her guests had already left, early as it was; but Mr. Ford returned to breakfast, stating that he had gone to see his daughter off on the train.

Several days after he, too, was called away, and his rooms were left to await his return.

It was during his absence that Justin Keener had called, in his impersonation of a scout, and had been shown the Ford rooms, which had inadvertently been left open when the lodger took a hasty departure from the house.

It was the day following Justin Keener's visit to Mrs. Caradine that the house bell rung and going to answer it the landlady found there a young woman, and who held out to her a letter with the remark:

"If yez is afther being Mrs. Caradine, I'm Maggie Maloney the girril you is wantin'."

Mrs. Caradine was rather struck with the pretty Irish girl, read the letter and replied:

"You are the girl I'm wanting, Maggie, and this is a strong recommendation you bring—I thank Mr. Keener for sending you to me."

"Thank you, ma'am, and I'll try and please ye."

"I have no doubt of that, Maggie, so come in and we'll talk over matters."

"Miss Maloney" had half an hour's conversation with Mrs. Caradine, and was shown what her duties would be, and where she would sleep.

It was the little room on the rear of the third floor, unused by the lodgers, and she seemed much pleased with her accommodations.

She was introduced to the invalid daughter of Mrs. Caradine with the remark:

"This is our new girl, dear, and she is anxious to make her home with us."

The invalid daughter was a young girl who had never been in very good health, and was most tenderly nursed by the mother, who felt that she was all she had to live for.

She was gradually growing stronger, and the physician gave her hope that her mind would soon be clear and healthy and her health improved.

Maggie's first duty was to prepare a tempting dish for the daughter, and when the lunch was ready she showed herself to be an excellent cook and Mrs. Caradine was delighted.

But had she seen Maggie slip out of her room that night, when the house was quiet, and with one of a bunch of false keys open the door of Mrs. Ford's apartments and enter, she would have been inclined to believe that her new servant was not honest.

Entering the rooms in felt slippers, Maggie made not the slightest sound, and lighting a candle she carried, she went slowly over all in the apartment.

Nothing escaped her eagle eyes, and she went from room to room, making a most thorough search of all that came in her way.

The trunk, bearing the name of Justin Keener, was there, but, after examining it outwardly, and merely trying her keys to find if she had one that would unlock it, she went on with her search and soon after left the rooms.

Half an hour after she was fast asleep.

But she was up bright and early the next morning, had breakfast on time and did the work devolving upon her quickly and well.

Mrs. Caradine made it a rule to go to market every morning, and she was just starting, when a man appeared at the door.

He was dressed in sailor garb, and had black hair, eyes and beard, while his face was not exactly a pleasant one.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked Mrs. Caradine, holding the door only half open.

"Be you the lady of the house?"

"I am."

"Mrs. Caradine?"

"Yes."

"Mr. M. S. Ford has his home here with you?"

"Yes, but he is away."

"I know that, for I came from where he is."

"Where is he?"

"Up at Waukegan, and he sent me here with the keys of his room and of a trunk in it, to get him some papers he needs."

"I am officer of the boat, and he wrote you this note."

Mrs. Caradine read the note and said:

"When do you wish the things?"

"Well, I stays in the city to-night, and he told me to stop in his rooms and get them then, and that you'd give me supper and breakfast."

"Certainly, if you wish to remain."

"I'll come back later," and the man took his leave.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MIDNIGHT MARAUDER.

THE night before the new girl went to the home of Mrs. Caradine, two men met, as

though by appointment, in the upper part of the city near the lake shore.

"Well, Saunders, you are prompt," said one.

"I always am, cap'n, when there is money in it."

"I received your note, telling me to absent myself from my dwelling-place, as you believed they were watched."

"Yes, I have reason to believe that you are suspected as dwelling there."

"Well, I wrote you to meet me here."

"And I am here."

"Did I not do my work well in New York?"

"Splendidly."

"The trunk panned out well?"

"It was the very thing I wanted."

"Has papers and all needed proofs in it, eh?"

"I have only glanced at it, but it has all that I want."

"Good! now when do I get my pay?"

"When I get mine."

"When will that be?"

"I'll tell you, Saunders, there is much to be done before I get the money I am after."

"It is an inheritance, as I told you, and there is proof to be given of the death of the heirs, and that I under an assumed name, am the man to get possession."

"It will take time."

"Oh yes, and I'll have to leave the country and act as a pretended attorney from London, while you remain here to watch developments."

"I see; but how am I to live?"

"I'll keep you in funds; but let me tell you now that I am afraid for that trunk to remain there where it is with those papers, and I wish you to get it away."

"How can I?"

"I'll give you a letter to the landlady, and my keys, and you can go there, making some excuse and get it."

"And then?"

"Bring it by boat at night to this point on the lake, at the foot of this street to-morrow night at twelve."

"I will be here to meet you, and I can carry it to where I wish it."

"I'll do it, cap'n; but have you some money with you, for I've some bills to pay?"

"There are a hundred dollars in this roll—take it."

Saunders pocketed the money, and the two parted.

It was the next morning that he called upon Mrs. Caradine and received her permission, as he had Mr. Ford's keys, to remain in the latter's rooms all night, and get the things needed.

When he appeared at dinner Maggie had it ready and a good meal it was.

Mrs. Caradine asked about the health of "Miss Ford," at which Saunders looked surprised, but made no comment. He merely answered that she was well, while to himself he muttered:

"Miss Ford! His daughter! Now what does *this* mean?"

After smoking his pipe, and a chat of an hour with Mrs. Caradine, Saunders professed to be tired and saying that he would breakfast at eight, he went up to the Ford apartment.

Entering the rooms with the key that he had, he glanced about him when he had lighted the gas.

"Pleasant quarters these, very; but, what does that *daughter* mean?"

"I'll take an observation of the rooms and see what I can find out—ah! there is the trunk!"

"Well, it holds a secret that I must know, and if he can make a fortune out of it why not I?"

"I guess I can and there will be no need of a division."

"No, I have been poor long enough, and

now I have it in my power to make a strike and I'll do it, if it be treachery to him.

"Yes, he can remain here and dodge the detectives as best he can, and I'll play the gentleman, for I know he does, though he keeps his identity hidden from me."

"Now for a thorough search of these rooms."

With this he began his search, first going into the room which had been occupied by Eleanor Enders.

He found a trunk, feminine attire and every evidence that a woman had lived there.

His next search was through the parlor, and there the trunk was.

From there he went to the rear rooms, which had been Ford's, and here he made a close scrutiny of all that came before his vision.

But he seemed anxious to return to the trunk, and going into the room he took from his pocket a key, remarking grimly:

"It's lucky I kept a key for myself, not knowing what might turn up in my favor."

He had not yet removed his hat or coat, and, kneeling down on the floor he unstrapped the trunk and inserted the key in the lock.

He found that the key fitted perfectly, and the trunk lid was quickly lifted.

Then he began his search, and found papers of an official character, letters yellow with age, some jewelry, consisting of rings, ear-rings, a watch and chain, bracelets, brooches and an old fashioned purse with some papers in it.

There was an old silk shawl, embroidered with a monogram, a comb, a prayer-book and Bible and a number of photographs.

The midnight marauder seemed much pleased with his discovery, and was so intent in looking over the things he was taking from the trunk, that he failed to observe the door slowly and softly open and some one enter.

The intruder made no sound as she advanced toward the man, one hand raised and in it a dagger.

She had on a wrapper, her black hair was all awry, and she appeared to have been aroused from sleep and dressing quickly had entered the room where Saunders was prowling around in his search.

CHAPTER XXX.

DICK DOOM'S IRON HAND.

NEARER and nearer crept Maggie Maloney, her knife ready to strike, and without a sound to betray her presence.

Nearer and nearer until she bent over the back of the marauder, and had him wholly at her mercy.

Then she said in a low voice:

"One cry and you are a dead man."

"You are my prisoner, Saunders!"

The man seemed as powerless as though struck a heavy blow.

His knees refused to support his weight, when he attempted to rise, and if he had wished to cry out he had not the power of speaking.

He turned, half fell over against the trunk and lay there, gazing at the woman as though he beheld a ghost.

But, Maggie Maloney held her knife ready in one hand while the other drew from a pocket a pair of steel manacles.

Quickly she slipped one upon the right wrist of the man and the click of the steel spring seemed to cause him to rally.

But quick came the words:

"Out with that other hand, or I drive my knife to the hilt in your heart!"

The hand came up and the other manacle was clasped upon it, while Saunders murmured:

"You are no woman!"

"No; I am Dick Doom the detective. I assumed this disguise to trap you, or whoever came to this house for devilry."

"Now that you know me you will obey me."

"Yes; but I haven't done nothing."

"That remains to be seen. I'll iron your feet and then chain you to this trunk until morning."

"Mercy!"

"With such as I believe you to be I know not the word."

"Come, no nonsense, for I am in an ugly humor to-night."

The man dared not resist, and with a small chain, but a strong one, run through the hand-straps of the trunk, he was made very secure.

The articles taken from the trunk were then replaced by Dick Doom, as the reader knows "Miss Maloney" to be, and turning out the gas the marauder was left in darkness and to his own meditations.

Then Dick Doom went to his own room, and taking a suit of male attire from his sachel, threw off his female garb and quickly dressed himself to go out.

He wrote on a slip of paper, and placed it on the dining-table as he went down. It read as follows:

"MRS. CARADINE:—

"Do not be alarmed if I am not back early in the morning; but I found the stranger robbing the house and have gone to get officers to arrest him. I have him secured up-stairs."

It was not quite midnight when, having slipped out of the house without making a sound to disturb Mrs. Caradine, Dick Doom knocked at Justin Keener's door.

The actor detective had not yet retired, and welcomed his friend with pleasure, while he asked:

"What, have you metamorphosed into a man again, Miss Maloney?"

"Yes, Mr. Keener, and there is work for us to do."

"I ordered a carriage and we are to take a long drive, but, let me tell you, to relieve your mind, that your trunk and its contents are secure."

"I am thankful to learn that, on account of the papers, for my personal loss would have been but slight in comparison. I am ready, Mr. Doom; but had I not better carry a gun?"

"Yes, we may need it."

"Don't let us cheat the gallows, Mr. Doom."

"Not if it can be helped and I believe it can," and Dick Doom led the way down to the carriage waiting at the door.

The driver was given his instructions and promised double fare if he drove rapidly, and with this incentive he drew up at the point where he was told to, in three-quarters of an hour.

"Remain here, driver, until I return, or send for you. Come, Mr. Keener," and Dick Doom led the way.

On the way out Dick Doom had explained to his actor assistant his plan of action, and had made known to him just what he had discovered in the rooms of Mr. Ford.

After a walk of five minutes the two came to the grounds of the Marlborough mansion.

They entered by the lake-shore, made their way to the stable, and, looking around the water end, Dick Doom saw the rope-ladder hanging out of the window and ascending it called out:

"Nick!"

There was a quick response from within and a voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"Dick Doom."

"Oh, Mr. Doom, I am Pete Pepper, and I will call Nick."

In a moment he came back to say that Nick was not in his cot; but just then Justin Keener called up to the detective:

"Nick is here."

"Pete, wake up your men and have them

on the alert and ready, while you come down to the pier and stand by the stable to await a call."

"Yes, sir," answered Pete Pepper, the second in command of the ferrets, and while he started to obey the detective's order, the latter descended and joined Justin Keener.

Nick Norcross was with him and said:

"I had just come out of the mansion, Mr. Doom, and saw you and Mr. Keener, but did not recognize who it was until I came near enough."

"Were you in the mansion, Nick?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir. I was afraid to take any one with me."

"Did you make any discovery?"

"Yes, Mr. Doom, I did."

"Well, I have made a discovery, too; but, what was yours, my brave boy?"

"I crept into the house, sir, as soon as my ferrets were asleep, and I went in the dark."

"You are indeed a plucky fellow," said Justin Keener, admiringly.

"I went up-stairs and waited, and was paid for my watching, for some one came out of an attic room and descended the stairs."

"I awaited for his return, and he went back with a bundle of things from the pantry."

"I could not get out of my hiding-place in time to capture him, and when I was able to follow, though he had entered the attic, he had disappeared."

"He carried a light then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was it?"

"He was enveloped in a sheet, sir, and playing ghost, so I could not see his face."

"We will soon know, so lead us to that attic room," Dick Doom ordered.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GHOST UNMASKED.

WITH a word of warning to Pete Pepper, to have his lanterns ready, his men down on the pier, and himself at the rear door of the mansion, Dick Doom was ready to go upon his voyage of discovery—in other words the ghost-hunt.

Nick led the way into the old mansion. Then lighting his dark lantern, with Dick Doom and Justin Keener following close upon his heels, he ascended to the floor above, leaving Pete Pepper guarding the exit behind them.

They went up to the upper floor and halted at the attic door.

Trying the knob it turned and the three entered.

It had been a billiard room and was furnished as such, the walls being in hard wood and panels.

Entering, they found the room vacant, but Nick whispered:

"There is some secret door leading out of this room, Mr. Doom, I am sure, for each time that man comes out of here he returns, but is not here when I have crept up to find him."

"We will soon see."

"Nick, you hold the dark lantern ready to flash at a signal, and Mr. Keener, you be ready to aid me."

"Now listen."

So saying Dick Doom gave a low moan.

It was repeated in a louder key, and sounded like some one dying, or in great suffering.

Louder and more frequent came the moans, until, suddenly, a voice was heard near at hand:

"Great God! what does that mean? Is this accursed old place really haunted?"

Then a light flashed into the room as a panel at the further end was opened, and a man appeared, holding a candle in his hand.

He stepped out into the attic, his face white, and enveloped in a sheet, and quick

as a flash Justin Keener, who was within two feet of him, threw himself upon him.

A powerful man and active, the comedian held his prisoner in a grip of steel, holding him to the floor, strong man that he was, when Nick Norcross flashed his bright light upon them, and Dick Doom sprung forward and clasped his gold fetters upon the wrists of the ghostly masquerader.

"Well, Merton Sanford, you are caught again," Dick Doom remarked.

"Yes, curses upon you, for the third time breaks the charm and, I am doomed," was the low reply—"doomed by Dick Doom!"

"Yes, you cannot escape always, and now we have another crime to hang you for."

"What is that?"

"Murder!"

"Whom do you accuse me of killing, this time?"

"Eleanor Enders."

"Oh, God! you know that?"

"Yes, and more: that you killed her, as you did her sister, to get possession of their fortune."

"I killed her sister because she was my wife, and stood in the way of my marrying Myrtle Marlborough the heiress," the prisoner averred promptly; "but I discovered a secret in killing her, that told me she, too, was an heiress with her twin sister and young brother."

"Oh, I might as well make a clean breast of it and tell you that they were my cousins, that their mother was my own father's sister."

"By their death, and their brother's, whom I cannot find, and believe to be dead, I would have secured the title and all the estates."

"I killed Eleanor Enders because she was determined to betray me, and I stopped that by drugging the coffee she drank for supper."

"Now you have it all, and the gallows will be my fate," and the terrible man laughed bitterly, while he added:

"Justin Keener, I believe I owe this to you."

"I only wish you did; but I have only been the ally of Dick Doom and his dauntless Boy Ferrets in running you down," was the comedian detective's reply.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

FOR the third time Merton Sanford was lodged in prison, and Dick Doom and the Boy Ferrets received all praise for their services, while the chief of the Secret Service said to Justin Keener that, as good an actor as he assuredly was, he had better give up the stage and turn detective.

"Not after my experience in the work, thank you, for I have played tragedy when I am only a comedian," was the answer.

The actor then went to the home of the prisoner, accompanied by Dick Doom, and relieved Mrs. Caradine's mind by telling her the whole story.

The prisoner was there as he had been left by the detective, and was quickly hustled off to jail.

Then the two went through Justin Keener's trunk, and the startling discovery was made that Bancroft Enders, when a boy, had been taken by one Nicholas Norcross, who had disappeared; but yet other papers went to prove that Nick, the Boy Ferret, was the sole and true heir to the English estate—his sisters both being dead.

Justin Keener at once went after the brave boy and brought him to Mrs. Caradine's. Nick was then told of the discovery made, and memory coming back to him as he saw his mother's and father's likenesses, and his sisters' photographs, he knew beyond doubt that he was the lost heir, and decided to start for England as soon as Estelle and Eleanor had been placed in a grave together.

Several days after this discovery, Merton Sanford was found dead in his cell.

"Heart disease," the officials said it was;

but they all knew that he had taken poison and ended his life.

Nick, or rather Bancroft Enders, promptly went to England, where he found a large fortune which would be his when he was of age; but he said he would return to America as a citizen as soon as he got possession of it. Under a tutor he is now traveling in foreign lands to fit himself for his new position in life, and Justin Keener often gets a letter from him telling of his welfare.

The Boy Ferrets, after Nick's departure, made Pete Pepper their captain, and are doing good service as detectives and shadowers, aiding Dick Doom in his most intricate cases. Their career, of course, is closely watched by Justin Keener, their actor ally, who still calls them the Owls of Chicago.

THE END.

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